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DRINK.

CHAPTER I.

GERVAISE had waited up for Lantier until two in the morning. Then, shivering through having remained exposed, in a thin, loose jacket, to the fresh air at the window, she had become drowsy and feverish, had thrown herself across the bed, her cheeks bathed in tears. For a week on leaving the "Two-Headed Calf" where they fed, he had sent her to bed with the children, and never reappeared himself till late, saying he had been in search of work. This evening, while watching for his return, she thought she had seen him enter the dancing hall of the "Grand Balcony," the blazing windows of which illumined the Boulevards with the glare of a conflagration; and five or six paces behind him she noticed little Adèle, a burnisher, who dined at their restaurant, pass along with him.

When Gervaise awoke, towards five o'clock, stiff and sore, she burst into sobs. Lantier had not returned. She remained seated on the edge of the bed. Slowly she glanced round the wretched room, furnished with a walnut chest of drawers, one drawer of which was wanting, three rush-bottomed chairs, and a little greasy table, on which stood a broken water jug. Gervaise's and Lantier's trunk stood wide open in one corner, and displayed its emptiness, while a man's old hat lay at the very bottom,

buried beneath some dirty shirts and socks; whilst against the walls, above articles of furniture, hung a shawl full of holes, and a pair of trousers begrimed with mud, the last rags which the dealers in old clothes declined to buy. In the centre of the mantelpiece, between two old zinc candlesticks, was a bundle of pawn tickets. It was the best room of the lodging-house, and looked on to the Boulevard.

The two children were sleeping side by side, with their heads on the same pillow. Claude, who was eight years of age, was breathing quietly, with his little hands thrown outside the coverlet, while Etienne, only just four years old, was smiling, one arm being passed round his brother's neck. As the mother looked upon them she broke into a fresh fit of sobbing, and pressed a handkerchief to her mouth to stifle the faint cries that escaped her. And, barefooted, without putting on the old shoes that had fallen on the floor, she returned to the window, and searched the distance with her eyes.

The house was situated in the Boulevard de la Chapelle, to the left of the Barriere Poissonnière. It was a building two storeys in height, painted the colour of wine dregs, up to the second floor, and with shutters rotted by the rain. Over a lamp with starred panes of glass, one could manage to read, between the two windows, the words "Hotel Boncœur," kept by Marsoulier, painted in big yellow letters. The lamp preventing Gervaise from seeing, she raised herself on tiptoe, still holding the handkerchief to her lips. She looked to the right, towards the Boulevard Rochechouart, where groups of butchers, in front of the slaughter houses stood in their blood-sméared aprons; and the fresh breeze wafted occasionally a stench of slaughtered beasts. Looking to the left, she scanned a long avenue that ended nearly in front of her, where the white mass of the Lariboisière Hospital was then in course of construction. Slowly, from one end of the horizon to the other, she surveyed the octroi wall, behind which she sometimes heard, during

night time, the shrieks of persons being murdered; and she eagerly looked into the remote angles, the dark corners, black with humidity and filth, fearing that she might discern Lantier's body pierced with knife-thrusts. When she raised her eyes beyond that grey and interminable wall, which encircled the city with a desert-like belt, she descried a great light, a sunny dust, already full of the early morning rumbling of awaking Paris. But it was always to the Barriere Poissonniere that she returned, stretching out her neck, and making her head dizzy by watching the uninterrupted flow of men, cattle, and carts that descended from the heights of Montmartre and La Chapelle, pass between the two low buildings of the octroi. There were the solid tramp of a drove, a crowd that sudden stoppages formed into groups like puddles in the roadway, an endless procession of labourers going to their work, with their tools slung over their shoulders, and loaves of bread under their arms; and this mixed mass was swallowed up by the great city in which they kept on disappearing. Each time Gervaise thought she recognised Lantier among all these people, she leaned out the more, at the risk of falling; at length she pressed the handkerchief more firmly to her mouth, as seeking to repress her grief.

A young and cheerful voice caused her to leave the window.

"Your husband isn't here, Madame Lantier?"

"Why, no, Monsieur Coupeau," she replied, trying to smile.

He was a zinc-worker, who occupied a mere closet at the top of the house, paying for it ten francs a month. His bag was slung on his shoulder; and finding the key in the door, he had entered in a neighbourly way.

"You know," he continued, "I'm now working at the hospital there. What beautiful May weather, isn't it? But the air is rather sharp this morning."

And he looked at Gervaise's face, red with weeping. When he saw that the bed had not been slept in, he

shook his head gently ; then he went up to the children's couch where they were sleeping, and looking as rosy as cherubs. Lowering his voice, he said,—

“What, hasn't the old man been home? Don't worry yourself, Madame Lantier. He's up to his ears in politics. The other day, when they elected Eugene Sue, a good man, it appears he was like one crazy. He has probably spent the night with some friends in black-guarding that crapulous Bonaparte.”

“No, no,” she murmured, with an effort ; “you don't believe that. I know where Lantier is. We have our little troubles like the rest of the world, God knows.”

Coupeau blinked his eyes, to indicate he was not duped by this falsehood. He went off, after offering to fetch her milk, if she did not care about going out ; she was a good and courageous woman, and might count upon him on any day of trouble.

When he had gone, Gervaise again returned to the window.

Gervaise was watching old Colombe's wineshop at the left of the street, where she thought she had seen Lantier, when a stout, bareheaded woman, wearing an apron, called to her from the middle of the roadway,—

“I say, Madame Lantier, you're up very early!”

Gervaise leaned out.

“Why, it's you, Madame Boche Oh ! I've a lot of work to-day.”

“Yes, things don't do themselves, do they?”

A conversation then ensued between the window and the pavement. Madame Boche was doorkeeper of the building, the ground floor of which was occupied by the restaurant of the “Two-Headed Calf.” Several times Gervaise had waited for Lantier in her room, to avoid sitting down by herself near the men who took their meals close by. The doorkeeper said she was going a few steps to the Rue de la Charbonnière, to catch a clerk in bed, who owed her husband for the repairing of a frock-coat. Whilst chatting, she scrutinised the young

woman with piercing curiosity, and seemed only to have come there and planted herself under the window for the purpose of finding something out.

"Is Monsieur Lantier still in bed?" she asked abruptly.

"Yes, he's asleep," replied Gervaise, who could not avoid blushing.

Madame Boche saw the tears come into her eyes; and satisfied, no doubt, she went away, declaring the men to be a cursed, lazy set. Turning round, she called back,—

"This is the morning you go to the wash-house, isn't it? I'm going too. I'll keep you a place next to me, and we can chat together." Then, as if moved with sudden pity, she added,—“My poor dear, you had better not remain there; you'll be taken ill. You look quite blue.”

Gervaise stayed at the window for two mortal hours, till eight o'clock. The shops had all opened. The Boulevards had now assumed their morning calm; men of leisure of the neighbourhood strolled about in the sunshine; mothers bareheaded, and in dirty skirts, dangling in their arms, as they transferred them to the seats, their babies in swaddling clothes; a number of half-naked brats, with dirty faces, jostled each other and rolled upon the ground, amid whining, laughter, and tears. Then Gervaise felt herself choking, seized with a fit of anguish, on the verge of despair. It seemed to her that all was over, that even time had come to an end, and that Lantier would return no more. Her eyes vacantly wandered from the hideous old slaughter-houses, with their butchery and their stench, to the new dismal hospital, which disclosed, through the yawning openings of its ranges of windows, the naked wards, where death was preparing his harvest. In front of her, beyond the octroi wall, the bright heavens, with the rising sun, which rose higher and higher over the vast awaking city, dazzled her.

The young woman was seated on a chair, her tears dried up, her hands lying idly in her lap, when Lantier quietly entered the room.

"It's you!—it's you!" she cried, rising to throw herself upon his neck.

"Yes, it's me. Stop!" he replied. "You are not going to begin any of your nonsense, I hope?"

He pushed her aside. Then with a gesture of ill-humour, he threw his black felt hat on to the chest of drawers. He was a young fellow of twenty-six years of age, short, and very dark, with a handsome figure, and slight moustache, which his hand was always mechanically twirling. He wore a workman's overalls, and an old soiled overcoat, which he had drawn tightly round the waist, and he spoke with a strong provincial accent.

Gervaise fell back on her chair, gently complaining in short sentences,—

"I've not been able to close an eye. I feared some harm had befallen you. Where have you been? Where did you pass the night? For Heaven's sake, don't do it again, or I shall go crazy! I say, Auguste, tell me, where have you been?"

"Where I'd business, of course," he returned, shrugging his shoulders. "At eight o'clock I was at La Glaciere with my friend, who is going to start a hat factory. We sat talking late, so I preferred to sleep there. Now you know, so do not bother me."

The young woman recommenced sobbing. The loud voices, and the rough movements of Lantier, who upset the chairs, awakened the children. They sat up in bed, half naked, disentangling their hair with their tiny hands, and, hearing their mother weep, they uttered terrible screams, crying also with their scarcely open eyes.

"Ah! there's the music!" exclaimed Lantier. "I warn you, I'll go off again, and this time it will be for good. You won't be silent? Then good morning. I'll return where I came from."

He had already taken his hat from off the chest of

drawers; but Gervaise threw herself before him and stammered out,—

“No, no!”

She hushed the little ones' tears with her caresses, smoothed their hair, and smoothed them with soft words. The children, suddenly solaced, laughing on their pillow, amused themselves by pinching one another. The father, however, without even taking off his boots, threw himself on the bed, looking worn out, his face bearing evidence of his having been up all night. He did not go to sleep; he lay with his eyes wide open, looking round the room.

“It's clean here,” he muttered. And after observing Gervaise a moment, he malignantly added :—“Don't you wash yourself now?”

Gervaise was only twenty-two-years old. She was tall, and rather slim, with delicate features, already jaded with the roughness of her life. Uncombed and in old shoes, shivering under her thin white jacket, all soiled with grease and the dust from the furniture, she seemed aged at least ten years by the hours of anguish and tears she had just gone through. Lantier's words made her throw off her timid and submissive attitude.

“You're unjust,” said she spiritedly. “You well know I do all I can. It's not my fault we find ourselves here. I would like to see *you* with the two children, in a room where there's not even a stove to heat some water. On going to Paris, instead of squandering your money, you should have made a home for us at once, as you promised.”

“I say!” he cried, “you cracked the nut with me; it does not become you to spit upon dainty morsels.”

But she appeared not to hear him, and continued,—

“However, it only requires courage to put us right again. I saw Madame Fauconnier, the laundress, in the Rue Neuve, yesterday evening, she will take me on Monday. If your friend at Glaciere engages you again, we'll have our heads above water again before six months are past,—just time enough to get ourselves some clothes,

and take a place somewhere that we can call our own. But we must work, work !”

Lantier turned towards the wall, and looked greatly bored. Then Gervaise lost her temper.

“ Yes, that’s it, the love of work troubles you but little. You’re crazy with ambition ; you want to be dressed like a gentleman. You don’t consider me nice enough, since you’ve made me put all my dresses in pawn ! Listen, Auguste, I didn’t intend to speak of it ; I would have waited longer yet, except for the fact that I know where you spent the night ; I saw you enter the ‘ Grand-Balcony ’ with that woman Adele. Well, I admire your taste ! She’s a nice party, she is ! it becomes her to put on the airs of a princess.”

Lantier sprang from the bed with a bound. His eyes had become as black as ink in his pale face. In this little man anger raged like a tempest.

“ Yes, yes, anyone knows how bad she is !” repeated the young woman.

Lantier raised his fists ; then, conquering the desire to strike her, he seized her by the arms, shook her violently, and sent her headlong on to the children’s bed, which set them crying afresh. He laid down again, mumbling, with the sullen air of a man who has formed a resolution to do something which before he had hesitated about.

“ You didn’t know what you’ve just done, Gervaise. You are wrong ; and you will find that out.”

The children continued sobbing. Their mother, who remained bending over the side of the bed, held them both in the same embrace : she repeated these words in a monotonous tone of voice, at least a score of times,—

“ Ah ! if it were not for you, my poor little ones ! If it were not for you there ! If it were not for you !”

Stretched out to his full extent, his eyes raised to the faded strip of chintz, Lantier no longer listened ; he seemed wrapped up in a fixed idea. He remained thus for nearly an hour, without going to sleep, in spite of the fatigue which weighed upon his eyelids. When he turned

round, raising himself on his arm, a harsh and determined look stamped upon his face, Gervaise had ceased putting the room to rights. She was making the children's beds. He watched her as she swept and dusted about that room, most dingy and miserable looking room, with its smoky ceiling, its paper peeling off the walls from the damp, its three rickety chairs, and its tumble-down chest of drawers, to which the dirt obstinately clung, and spread more and more beneath the duster. Then when she had washed herself, and went to do up her hair in front of a little round hand-glass hung to the window-fastening, which Lantier used to shave himself by, he appeared to be examining her bare arms, and throat, and shoulders, the whole of the nude portion of her person exposed, as though he was forming a mental comparison. He pouted his lips. Gervaise limped with the right leg; but it was scarcely perceptible, excepting on days when she was tired, when, her hips aching from fatigue, and she was careless how she walked. This morning, knocked up by the restless night which she had passed, she dragged her leg, and leant against the wall.

Silence still reigned: they did not exchange a word. He seemed to be waiting for something. She, repressing her grief, trying to assume an indifferent look, hurried over her work. While she was tying the dirty clothes into a bundle thrown in a corner behind the trunk, he at length opened his lips and asked,—

“What are you doing there? Where are you going?”

She did not answer at first. Then when he furiously repeated his question, she answered decisively,—

“You can see for yourself, can you not? I'm going to wash all this. The children can't live in filth.”

He let her pick up two or three handkerchiefs; and, after a fresh pause, he resumed,—

“Have you got any money?”

Suddenly she stood up, looked him in the face, and said, without letting go the children's dirty shirts, which she held in her hands,—

"Money, did you say? Where do you think I can have stolen any? You know quite well that I got three francs the day before yesterday on my black skirt. We've lunched off it twice, and money does not go far at the pork-butcher's. No, certainly not, I've no money. I've four sous for the wash-house. I don't earn money like certain women."

He did not take up this allusion. He moved off the bed, and passed in review the few rags hanging about the room. Then he took up the pair of trousers and the shawl, and, searching the drawers, added to the bundle a woman's loose jacket and two chemises. Throwing the bundle into Gervaise's arms, he said,—

"Here, go and hang up this."

"Don't you want me to pawn the children as well?" asked she. "Ah! if they lent money on children, it would be a capital riddance!"

She went to the pawnshop however. When she returned in half-an-hour, she laid a hundred sou piece on the mantelpiece, and added the ticket to the others which lay between the two candlesticks.

"That's what they advanced me," said she, "I wanted six francs, but they would not let me have it. They'll never ruin themselves; besides, there's always such a crowd there!"

Lantier did not immediately pick up the five-franc piece. He preferred that she should change it, so that she might have some of it. But when he noticed a small piece of ham wrapped up in paper, and the remains of a loaf on the chest of drawers, he decided to slip it into his waistcoat pocket.

"I did not go to the milkwoman's, as we owe her a week," explained Gervaise; "but I shall not be long in going there. You can get some bread and some cutlets whilst I'm away, and then we'll have lunch. Bring a bottle of wine as well."

He did not say no. Peace seemed to be established again. The young woman was completing her bundle of

dirty clothes. But when she would have taken Lantier's shirts and socks from the bottom of the trunk, he called to her to leave them alone.

"Leave those things, d'ye hear! I don't want 'em touched!"

"What's it you don't want touched?" she asked, standing up. "Surely you don't mean to put these dirty things on again, do you? They must be washed!"

And she anxiously scrutinised him, finding in his handsome face the same harshness, as if nothing would ever melt it again. He flew into a passion, snatched the things from her hands, and threw them back into the trunk.

"Damnation! obey me, then, for once, when I tell you that I won't have 'em touched!"

"But why?" she added, turning pale, a terrible suspicion creeping over her. "You don't want your shirts now; you're not going out. What can it matter to you if I take them?"

He hesitated an instant, embarrassed by the piercing eyes she fixed upon him.

"Why—why—" stammered he, "because you go and tell everyone that you keep me, that you wash and mend. Well, it annoys me, there! Attend to your own business, and I'll attend to mine. Washerwomen don't work for dogs."

She supplicated, she denied having ever complained; but he brutally closed the trunk and sat down upon it, and cried "No!" in her face. He was surely the master of what belonged to him! Then, to escape from the looks she pursued him with, he went and lay down on the bed again, saying that he was sleepy, and that she was not to trouble him any more.

Gervaise remained for a while undecided. She was tempted to kick the bundle of dirty clothes on one side, and to sit down and sew. But Lantier's regular breathing by-and-by reassured her. She took the ball of blue and the piece of soap remaining from her last washing, and

going up to the little ones, who were quietly playing with some old corks in front of the window, kissed them, and said to them in a low voice,—

“Be very good; don’t make any noise; papa’s asleep.”

When she left the room, Claude’s and Etienne’s gentle laughter alone disturbed the silence of the room. It was ten o’clock. A ray of sunshine entered by the half-open window.

On the Boulevard, Gervaise turned to the left, and followed the Rue Neuve de la Goutte-d’Or. In passing Madame Fauconnier’s shop, she saluted her by slightly bowing her head. Gervaise was acquainted with the mistress of the wash-house, a delicate little woman with sore eyes, who sat in a small glass closet with account books in front of her, bars of soap on shelves, balls of blue in glass bowls, and pounds of soda done up in packets.

Gervaise passed slowly along the alley, casting looks right and left. She carried her bundle of clothes on her arm, with one hip higher than the other, limping more than usual in the passing backwards and forwards of the other women who jostled against her.

“This way, my dear!” cried the harsh voice of Madame Boche.

Then, when the young woman had joined her at the very end on the left, the doorkeeper, who was furiously rubbing a sock, began to talk in short sentences, without leaving off her work.

“Put your things there; I’ve kept your place. Oh, I sha’n’t be very long! And you, you won’t be long either, will you? Your bundle’s quite a little one. Before twelve o’clock we shall have finished, and we can go off to lunch. I say, you should have put those shirtsto soak. Those little rascals of children, on my word! See, that one is covered with soot!”

Gervaise undid her bundle, and spread out the little ones’ shirts; and when Madame Boche advised her to take a pailful of lye, she answered,—

"Oh, no ! warm water will do. I'm used to it."

"You're used to it, eh?" repeated Madame Boche. "You were a washerwoman in your native place, weren't you, my dear?"

Gervaise, with her sleeves turned up, displaying her fine fair arms, still fresh, and scarcely reddened at the elbows, commenced to scour her linen. She spread a garment over the narrow plank of the washing-place, whitened and eaten away by the wear and tear of the water ; she rubbed it over with soap, turned it, and rubbed it on the other side. Before answering, she seized her beetle and began to beat, shouting out her sentences, and punctuating them with rough and regular blows.

"Yes, yes, a washerwoman—When I was ten—That's twelve years ago—We used to go to the river—It smelt better than here—You should have seen, there was a nook under the trees, with clear running water—You know, at Plassans—Don't you know Plassans?—It's near Marseilles !"

"You work like a slave !" exclaimed Madame Boche, amazed at the strength of her blows. "What a wench ! She'd flatten out a piece of iron with her little, lady-like arms."

"No, we're not married," resumed Gervaise. "I don't hide it. Lantier isn't so nice that one should care to be his wife. If it weren't for the children ! I was fourteen and he was eighteen years old when we had our first ; the other came four years later. It came about as it always does, you know ; I wasn't happy at home. Old Macquart, for a yes or a no, would give me no end of kicks. We might have been married, but—I forget why—our parents wouldn't consent." She shook her hands, which had reddened in the white suds. "The water's awfully hard in Paris," said she.

Madame Boche was now washing very slowly. She would stop, so as to make her work last as long as she could, in order to remain there, to listen to that story, which had been torturing her curiosity for a fortnight. Her mouth was half

open in the midst of her cross face ; her eyes, which were almost at the top of her head, were gleaming. She was thinking, with the satisfaction of having guessed right,—“That’s it, the little one, gossips too much. There’s been a scrimmage.” Then she observed aloud,—

“He isn’t too kind, then?”

“Don’t mention it!” replied Gervaise. “In the country he was very good to me ; but since we’ve been in Paris, I don’t know what to make of him. I must tell you that his mother died last year, and left him some money—about seventeen hundred francs. He would come to Paris ; so, as old Macquart was forever knocking me about without warning, I consented to come away with him. We made the journey with the two children. He was to set me up as a laundress, and he was to work at his trade of a hatter. We should have been very happy ; but, you see, Lantier’s ambitious, and a spendthrift—a fellow who only thinks of amusing himself. In short, he’s not worth much. We went to the Hotel Montmartre, in the Rue Montmartre. Then theré were dinners, and cabs, and the theatre ; a watch for himself, and a silk dress for me, for he’s not bad-hearted when he’s got the money. He went in for everything, and so well, that at the end of two months we were cleaned out. It was then that we came to live at the Hotel Boncœur, and when this horrible life began——” She interrupted herself. A lump had suddenly risen in her throat, and she could scarcely restrain her tears. She finished brushing the things. “I must go and fetch my hot water,” she murmured.

But Madame Boche, greatly disappointed at this break off in Gervaise’s confidences, called to the wash-house boy, who was passing,—

“Little Charles, kindly fetch Madame a pail of hot water ; she’s in a hurry.”

The boy took the pail, and brought it back filled. Gervaise paid him ; it was a sou the pailful. She poured the hot water into the tub, and soaped the things a last time with her hands, leaning over the washstand in a msss of

steam, from which were deposited small beads of grey vapour in her light hair.

"Stop, put some soda in, I've got some here," said the doorkeeper obligingly.

And she emptied into Gervaise's tub the remains of a bag of soda. She also offered her some of the chemical water, but the young woman declined it; it was only good for grease and wine stains.

"I think he's a little free and easy," resumed Madame Boche, in returning to Lantier, but without naming him.

Gervaise, bent double, her hands all shrivelled, and thrust in among the clothes, answered by an inclination of the head.

"Yes, yes," continued the other, "I've noticed several little things—"

But she checked herself, as Gervaise drew herself up straight, presenting a pale face, and staring wildly at her.

"Oh, no! I don't know anything. He's fond of a lark, I think, that's all. For instance, you know the two girls who lodge at my place, Adele and Virginie? Well, he larks about with them; but it doesn't go any further, I'm sure."

The young woman standing before her, with her face covered with perspiration, and the water dripping from her arms, continued to stare at her with a fixed and penetrating look. Then the doorkeeper got excited, placed her hand on her chest, and pledged her word of honour.

"I know nothing, and I mean it when I say so," she said.

Then, calming herself, she added, in a gentle voice, as one would speak to a person on whom loud protestations would have no effect,—“He appears to have a frank look about the eyes. He'll marry you, my dear; I'm sure of it.”

Gervaise passed her wet hand over her forehead. She then drew another article of clothing from the water, as she again tossed her head. Both remained silent for a moment. Peace prevailed around them in the wash-house; eleven o'clock was striking.

"We're almost finished, and I am not sorry for it," said

Madame Boche. "I'll wait and help you wring your things out."

"Oh! it's not worth while; I'm much obliged though," responded the young woman, who was kneading with her hands, and sousing the coloured things in some clean water. "If I'd any sheets it would be otherwise."

She had, however, to accept the doorkeeper's assistance. The two were wringing, one at each end, a skirt, a woollen skirt of a washed-out chestnut colour, from which dropped a yellowish water, when Madame Boche exclaimed,—

"Why, there's tall Virginie! What, has she come here to wash, with her old clothes which would go into the four corners of a pocket handkerchief?"

Gervaise quickly raised her head. Virginie was a girl of her own age, taller than she was, dark, and pretty in spite of her rather long face. She wore an old black dress with flounces, and a red ribbon round her neck; her hair was done up carefully, the chignon being enclosed in a blue silk net. For an instant, from the middle of the central alley, she looked about her as if seeking for someone; when she caught sight of Gervaise, she walked past close to her, erect, insolent, and wagging her tails, installed herself in the same row, five tubs away from her.

"There's a caper for you," continued Madame Boche, in a lower tone of voice. "She never even washes a pair of cuffs. Ah! she's a lazy slut, take my word for it. A needlewoman who does not sew a button on her boots. It's the same with her sister, the burnisher, that ragged Adele, who's away from the workshop two days out of three. They do not know who their father or their mother is; and how they live no one knows; and if one chose to talk—What's that she's rubbing there? Eh! it's a petticoat. It's in a pretty state. It must have seen some fine goings-on, that petticoat."

Madame Boche evidently wished to please Gervaise. But the truth was, she often took a cup of coffee with Adele and Virginie, when the girls had any money. Gervaise did not answer, but hurried on with feverish hands.

She had just made her blue in a little tub that stood on three legs. She dipped in the linen things, and shook them an instant at the bottom of the coloured water, the reflection of which had a pinky tinge; and after wringing them tightly, she spread them out on the wooden bars, up above. While she was doing all this, she affected to turn her back on Virginie. But she could hear her chuckling, and feel her sidelong glances. Virginie seemed to have come only to provoke her. Gervaise having turned round, they stared at each other for a moment.

"Never mind her," murmured Madame Boche. "You're not going to pull each other's hair out, I hope. I tell you it's nothing."

As the young woman was hanging up the last piece of linen, there was some laughter at the door of the washhouse.

"Here are two children who are asking for their mamma!" cried Charles.

All the women leant forward. Gervaise recognised Claude and Etienne. As soon as they caught sight of her, they ran to her through the puddles, the heels of their unlaced shoes, pattering on the flagstones. Claude, the elder, held his little brother by the hand. The women, as they passed them, gave vent to little exclamations of affection, as they noticed their frightened, though smiling, faces. They stood there, in front of their mother, without letting go each other, holding erect their fair heads.

"Has papa sent you?" asked Gervaise.

As she bent down to tie the laces of Etienne's shoes, she observed the key of the room hanging from one of Claude's fingers, with the brass number attached to it.

"See! you've brought the key!" said she, greatly surprised. "Why?"

The child, on seeing on his finger the key, which he had forgotten, appeared to recollect, and exclaimed in his clear voice,—

"Papa's gone!"

"He's gone to buy the lunch, and told you to come here to fetch me?"

Claude, looking at his brother, hesitated, not knowing any more. Then he continued all in one breath,—

“Papa’s gone. He jumped off the bed, put all the things in the box, and carried the box down to a cab. He’s gone!”

Gervaise rose slowly to her feet, her face ghastly pale, and put her hands to her cheeks and temples, as though she felt her head was splitting. She could find only one phrase, which she repeated twenty times in the same tone of voice,—

“Ah! my God!—my God!—my God!”

Madame Boche, in turn, questioned the child, quite delighted at what she had heard.

“Come, my little fellow, you must tell us just what happened. It was your father who locked the door, and who told you to bring the key, wasn’t it?” And, lowering her voice, she whispered in Claude’s ear:—“Was there a lady in the cab?”

The child was again perplexed. Then he repeated his story in a triumphant manner,—

“He jumped off the bed, put all the things in the box. He’s gone!”

When Madame Boche left him, he drew his brother in front of the tap, and they amused themselves by turning on the water.

Gervaise was unable to cry. She was choking, and leant back against her tub, her face still buried in her hands. Slight shivering fits seized her. At times a long sigh escaped her, whilst she thrust her fists firmer into her eyes, so as to shut out the horror of her abandonment. It was an abyss of darkness, to the bottom of which she seemed to fall.

“Come, my dear, what does it matter?” muttered Madame Boche.

“If you but knew! if you but knew!” said she at length, faintly. “He sent me this morning to pawn my shawl and other things, so that he could pay for that cab.”

And she burst out crying. The recollection of her

visit to the pawnshop, fixing in her mind one of the events of the morning, had given an outlet to the sobs which were choking her. That visit was abhorrent—the great grief in her despair. The tears ran down her cheeks, which her hands had already wiped, without her thinking of simply taking a handkerchief.

“Be reasonable; do be quiet; they are looking at you,” Madame Boche, who hovered round her, kept repeating. “Is it possible that you can feel so bad about a man? You loved him, then, all the time, eh, my poor darling? A little while ago you were pretty hard upon him, and now you cry for him, and break your heart. Good God! what fools we are!”

She broke off suddenly, turned round, then resumed, lowering her harsh voice,—

“She’s laughing at seeing you cry, that heartless wretch over there. I’d put my hand in the fire, if I did not think that her washing’s all a pretence. She’s sent off the other two, and she’s come here so as to tell them what a fuss you make.”

Gervaise removed her hands from her face, and looked. When she beheld Virginie in front of her, surrounded by three or four women, speaking low and staring at her, she was seized with a mad rage. She thrust out her arms, turned round, trembling in every limb, then walked a few steps, and noticing a bucket full of water, she seized it with both hands, and threw the contents with all her might.

“The camel-backed she-goat!” yelled tall Virginie.

She had taken a step back, and her boots alone got wet. The other women, who for some minutes past had all been affected by Gervaise’s tears, jostled each other in order to see the fight. Those who were finishing their lunch got on the tops of their tubs. Others hastened forward, their hands smothered with soap. A ring was formed.

“Ah! the she-goat!” repeated tall Virginie. “What’s the matter with her? She’s mad.”

Gervaise, standing on the defensive, her chin thrust out, her features convulsed, said nothing, not having yet acquired the Paris gift of the gab. The other continued,—

“Get out! It’s tired of wallowing about in the country; it wasn’t twelve years old when it shared a soldier’s palliasse; it’s left its leg behind in its native place. The leg fell off; it was rotting away.”

A laugh ran round. Virginie, seeing her success, advanced a couple of steps, drawing herself up to her full height, and yelling still louder,—

“Here, come nearer, just to see how I’ll settle this affair. You know you must not come annoying us here. Do I even know her, the dried-up skeleton? If she’d wetted me, I’d have pretty soon made her cry out, as you’d have seen. Let her but repeat what I’ve done to her. Speak, you vixen; what’s been done to you?”

“Talk less,” stammered Gervaise. “You know quite well. Someone saw my husband last night. And shut up, or, if you don’t, I’ll strangle you.”

“Her husband! Ah, that’s too good. Madame’s husband! As if such a scarecrow had a husband. It isn’t my fault if he’s left you. You don’t suppose I’ve stolen him. I’m ready to be searched. I’ll tell you why he’s gone; you were corrupting the man. He was too well-bred for *you*. Did he have his collar on, though? Who’s found madame’s husband? A reward is offered.”

The laughter burst forth again. Gervaise contented herself with continually murmuring, in an almost low tone of voice,—

“You know quite well; you know quite well. It’s your sister; I’ll strangle her—your sister.”

“Yes, go and try it on with my sister,” resumed Virginie, sneeringly. “Ah! it’s my sister. That’s very likely. My sister looks a trifle different from you; but what’s that to me? Can’t a person come and wash her clothes in peace now? Dry up, d’ye hear, because I’ve had enough of it!”

But it was she who returned to the attack, after giving five or six blows with her beetle, intoxicated by the insults she had been uttering, and worked up into a fury. She left off and recommenced again, speaking thus three times,—

“Well, yes! it’s my sister. There now, does that please you? They adore each other. You should only see them bill and coo. And he’s left you with your youngsters. Those pretty chicks with scars all over their faces. One of ’em’s by a gendarme, isn’t he? and you had three others done for because you didn’t like to pay for extra luggage on your journey. It’s your Lantier who told us that. Ah! he’s been telling some fine things; he’d had quite enough of you.”

“You dirty slut! you dirty slut! you dirty slut!” yelled Gervaise, beside herself, and again seized with a furious trembling. She turned about, looking once more round the ground, and only observing the small tub, she seized hold of it by the legs, and flung all the blue water at Virginie’s face.

“The beast! she’s spoilt my dress!” cried the latter, with her shoulder sopping wet, and her left hand dyed blue. “Wait a minute.”

In her turn she seized a bucket, and emptied it over the young woman. Then a formidable struggle began. They ran along the rows of tubs, seized hold of the pails that were full, and returned to dash the contents at each other’s heads. And each splash was accompanied by a volley of words. Gervaise herself answered now,—

“There! You got it that time. It’ll help to cool you down.”

“Ah the carrion. There’s for you.”

“Yes, yes. I’ll be up-sides with you.”

“Another one!”

They finished by filling the buckets at the taps. And as they waited while these filled, they continued their talk. The first pailfuls, badly directed, scarcely touched them; but they soon got better aim. It was Virginie

who first received one full in the face; the water, entering at the neck of her dress, ran down her back and bosom, and flowed out under her dress. She was still quite giddy with the shock, when a second one caught her from the side, giving her a sharp blow on the left ear, and soaking her chignon, which unrolled like a lump of string. Gervaise was first struck in the legs. They were both of them dripping from head to heel, the bodices of their dresses adhered to their shoulders, their skirts clung to their loins, and they were thin, stiff, and shivering, as the water dropped on all sides, as it does off umbrellas during a heavy shower.

"How funny they look!" cried the hoarse voice of a washerwoman.

Everyone in the wash-house was amused. A good space was left to the fighters, nobody caring to get splashed. Applause and jokes went on in the midst of the sluice-like noise of the buckets emptied every moment. On the floor the puddles were flowing one into another, and the two women were wading in them up to their ankles. Virginie, however, who had been meditating a treacherous movement, suddenly seized hold of a pail of boiling lye, which one of her neighbours had been using, and threw it. A loud cry arose. Everyone thought Gervaise was scalded; but only her left foot had been slightly grazed. And then, exasperated by the pain, she seized a bucket, without troubling herself to fill it this time, and threw it with all her might at the legs of Virginie, who fell down. All the washerwomen spoke at once.

"She's broken a limb!"

"Well, the other tried to cook her!"

"She's right, after all—the fair one—if they have taken her man from her!"

Madame Boshe raised her arm to heaven, uttering all kinds of exclamations. She had prudently got out of the way between two tubs; and the children, Claude and Etienne, crying, choking, terrified, clung to her dress with

the continuous cry of "Mamma! Mamma!" only broken by their sobs. When she saw Virginie fall, she hurried forward and tried to pull Gervaise away by her skirt, as she cried,—

"Come now—go along; be reasonable. Upon my word, it's quite upset me! Never was such slaughter seen before!"

But she drew back and took refuge again between the two tubs with the children. Virginie had just dashed at Gervaise's throat. She seized her round the neck, trying to strangle her. The latter freed herself with a violent twist, and in her turn hung on to the end of the other's chignon, as if she were trying to pull her head off. The battle was silently resumed, without a cry, without an insult. They did not catch each other round the body, they attacked each other's faces with open hands and clutching fingers, pinching and scratching whatever they laid hold of. The dark, tall girl's red ribbon and blue silk hair-net were torn off. The body of her dress, as it gave way at the neck, displayed her whole shoulder; while the blonde, half stripped, a sleeve away from her loose white jacket, without knowing how, had a rent in her chemise, which exposed to view the naked line of her waist. Shreds of stuff flew in all directions. It was from Gervaise that the first flood was drawn, three long scratches from the mouth to the chin; and she protected her eyes, shutting them at every attack the other made, for fear of having them torn out. No blood showed on Virginie yet. Gervaise at length succeeded in seizing hold of one of her earrings—an imitation pear of yellow glass—when she pulled and tore the ear, and the blood began to flow.

"They're killing one another! Separate them, the brutes!" exclaimed several voices.

The other women had approached. They formed themselves into two camps. Some excited the combatants in the same way as the mob urge on snarling dogs, while the others, more nervous and trembling, turned

away their heads, having had enough of it, and kept saying that they were sure they would be ill; and a general engagement was on the point of taking place. The combatants styled each other heartless and good for nothing; bare arms were thrust out—three slaps were heard.

Madame Boche, meanwhile, sought for the wash-house boy.

“Charles! Charles! Where has he gone to?”

She found him in the front row, looking on with his arms akimbo. He was a big fellow, with an enormous neck. He was laughing, and enjoying the view of the pieces of skin which the two women exhibited. The little blonde was as plump as a quail.

“Why!” he murmured, winking, “she has a strawberry mark under the arm.”

“What! you’re there?” cried Madame Boche, as she caught sight of him. “Just come and help to separate them. You can easily do that, can’t you?”

“Oh, no! thanks; not if I know it,” said he, coolly. “To have my eye scratched as I did the other day, I suppose! I’m not in for that sort of thing; I should have too much work if I was.”

The struggle on the ground continued. All of a sudden Virginie raised herself up on her knees. She had got hold of a beetle, and brandished it on high. She had a rattling in her throat, and, in a changed voice, she exclaimed,—

“Here’s something that’ll settle you!”

Gervaise quickly thrust out her hand, and also seized a beetle, holding it up like a club; and she spoke in a choking voice,—

“Ah! you want to wash. Let me get hold of your skin, till I cut it into pieces!”

For a moment they remained there, on their knees, threatening each other. Their hair all over their faces, their breasts heaving, muddy, swollen with rage, they watched one another, as they waited to take breath. Gervaise gave the first blow. Her beetle glided off

Virginie's shoulder, and she at once threw herself on one side to avoid the latter's beetle, which just grazed her hip. Then, fairly in action, they struck at each other like washerwomen beating clothes, roughly and in time. Whenever a hit was made, the sound was deadened, so that one might have thought it a blow in a tub of water. The other women around them no longer laughed. Several had gone away, saying that it quite upset them; those who remained stretched out their necks, their eyes lighted up with a gleam of cruelty, admiring the spirit shown. Madame Boche had led Claude and Etienne away, and at the other end of the house the sound of their sobs could be heard, mingled with the sonorous shocks of the two beetles. But Gervaise suddenly yelled out. Virginie had caught her a blow with all her force on her naked arm, just above the elbow. A large red mark appeared, the flesh at once beginning to swell. Then she threw herself on Virginie, and everyone imagined she was going to beat her to death.

"Enough! enough!" all cried out together.

Her face bore such a terrible expression that no one dared to approach her. Her strength seemed to have increased ten times. She seized Virginie by the waist, bent her down, and pressed her face against the flagstones, her back in the air. Then, raising her beetle, she commenced beating as she used to do at Plassans, on the banks of the Viorne, when her mistress washed the clothes of the garrison. The wood seemed to yield the flesh with a damp sound. At each blow a red weal marked the white skin.

"Oh, oh!" murmured the boy Charles, opening his eyes to their widest and gloating over the scene.

Some laughter again burst forth from the spectators, but soon the cry, "Enough! enough!" recommenced. Gervaise heard not, neither did she weary.

"Bang bang! Margot at her tub—Bang! bang! beating rub-a-dub—Bang! bang! tries to wash her heart—Bang! bang! black with grief to part—"

And then she went on,—

“That’s for you, that’s for your sister, that’s for Lantier! When you see them, you can give them that. Attention! I’m going to begin again. That’s for Lantier, that’s for your sister, that’s for you! Bang! bang! Margot at her tub—Bang! bang! beating rub-a-dub—”

The others were obliged to drag Virginie out of her hands. The tall dark girl, her face bathed in tears, and purple, picked up her linen and hastened away. She was vanquished. Gervaise drew on the sleeve of her jacket again, and fastened up her clothes. Her arm pained her considerably, and she asked Madame Boche to place her bundle of clothes on her shoulder. The doorkeeper referred to the battle, spoke of her feelings, and talked of examining the young woman’s body to see.

“You may perhaps have something broken. I heard a fearful stroke.”

But the young woman wanted to return home. She made no reply to the remarks of pity and the noisy greetings of the other women who surrounded her, erect in their aprons. When she was laden she gained the door, where the children waited for her.

“Two hours, that makes two sous,” said the mistress of the wash-house, already back at her position in the glazed closet.

Why two sous? She no longer understood that she was asked to pay for her place there. Then she gave the two sous; and, limping very much under the weight of the wet clothes on her shoulder, the water dripping from her dress, her elbow black, and her cheek covered with blood, she went off, dragging Claude and Etienne with her bare arms, whilst they trotted along at her side, still trembling, and their faces begrimed with their tears.

When Gervaise turned into the passage of the Hotel Boncœur, her tears again took possession of her. It was a dark, narrow entry, with a gutter for the dirty water running along by the wall; the stench which she again

met there, caused her to think of the fortnight she had passed in the place with Lantier—a fortnight of misery and quarrels, whose recollection was now a bitter regret. It seemed to bring her abandonment more before her mind.

Upstairs the room was bare; the sunshine entered through the open window. That blaze of light, that kind of dancing golden dust, showed the wretched condition of the blackened ceiling, and of the walls, with the paper half torn off them, all the more. The only thing left in the room was a woman's small neckerchief, twisted like a bit of string. The children's bed, drawn into the middle of the apartment, displayed the chest of drawers, the open drawers of which exposed their emptiness. Lantier had washed himself and had used the last of the pomade—a pennyworth of pomade on a playing-card; the greasy water from his hands filled the basin. He had forgotten nothing, and the corner which, until then, had been filled by the trunk, seemed to Gervaise a huge empty space. She found that even the little hand-glass which hung on the window-fastening was gone. When she saw this she had a presentiment. She looked on the mantelpiece. Lantier had taken away the pawn tickets; the pink packet was no longer there between the two odd zinc candlesticks.

She flung her washing on the back of a chair, and remained standing, but turning round, examining the furniture, and seized with such a stupor that her tears no longer flowed. One alone remained to her out of the four sous she had kept for the wash-house. Then, hearing Claude and Etienne laughing at the window, and already consoled, she went up to them, took their heads under her arms, and forgot for a moment her troubles as she looked out on that grey highway, where she had in the morning seen the awaking of the labouring classes, of the giant work of Paris. At this hour, the pavement, warmed by the labours of the day, lit up a scorching reverberation above the city, behind the octroi wall. It

was on that pavement, in that furnace-like atmosphere, that she had been cast all alone with her little ones; and her gaze wandered up and down the exterior Boulevards, to the right and to the left, pausing at either end ; and she was seized with a dull fear, as if she knew her life would henceforth hang there, between a slaughter-house and a hospital.

CHAPTER II

ABOUT three weeks later, at half-past eleven one beautiful day of sunshine, Gervaise and Coupeau, the zinc-worker, were partaking together of plums preserved in brandy at the Assommoir kept by old Colombe. Coupeau, who had been smoking a cigarette on the pavement, had prevailed on her to go inside as she crossed the road returning from taking home a customer's washing; and her large square laundress's basket was on the floor beside her, behind the little zinc-covered table.

Old Colombe's Assommoir was situated at the corner of the Rue des Poissonniers, and the Boulevard de Rochechouart. The outside inscription consisted of the one word "Distillation" in big blue letters, which covered the space completely. On either side of the doorway, planted in the two halves of a cask, grew some oleanders covered with dust. The enormous counter, with its rows of glasses, its filter and its pewter measures, stretched along to the left on entering; and the huge saloon was ornamented the whole way round with big barrels painted a bright yellow, shining with varnish, and the hoops and brass taps of which were dazzlingly bright. Higher up on shelves, bottles of liqueurs, glass jars full of preserved fruits, all kinds of phials neatly arranged, covered the walls and reflected in the mirror placed behind the bar their vivid apple green, pale gold, and delicate crimson tints. On the other side of an oaken barrier, in a courtyard covered with glass, was the distilling apparatus, which the customers could see at work; stills with long

necks, and worms that went down underground—a regular devil's kitchen, before which the drunken workmen would come and dream.

At this, the luncheon hour, the Assommoir was almost empty. A stout man of forty, old Colombe, dressed in a waistcoat with sleeves, was serving a little girl about ten with four sous' worth of brandy in a cup. A blaze of sunshine entered through the doorway, warming the floor ever damp with smokers' saliva. And, from the bar, the barrels, the whole place, there went up a spirituous odour, an alcoholic fume, which seemed to thicken and intoxicate the dust floating in the sunlight.

Coupeau was making a fresh cigarette. He was very clean, in a cap and short blue linen blouse, laughing and showing his white teeth. With a projecting under jaw, and a slightly snub nose, he had yet handsome chestnut eyes, and the face of a good fellow. His coarse, curly hair stood erect. His skin still preserved the softness of his twenty-six years. Opposite to him, Gervaise, in a frock of black Orleans stuff, and bareheaded, was finishing her plum, which she held by the stalk between the tips of her fingers. They were close to the street, at the first of the four tables placed along the barrels facing the counter.

The zinc-worker having lit his cigarette, placed his elbows on the table, thrust his face forward, and for an instant looked without speaking at the young woman, whose pretty fair face had that day the milky transparency of fine porcelain. Then, alluding to a matter known to themselves only, and already discussed, he simply asked in a low voice,—

“So it's to be ‘no’ is it?—you say ‘no’?”

“Oh! most decidedly ‘no,’ Monsieur Coupeau,” quietly replied Gervaise, smiling. “Now you're not going to talk to me about that here. You know you promised me you would be reasonable. Had I known, I should have refused your treat.”

He did not resume speaking, but continued looking at her closely, with a bold tenderness which seemed to offer

itself, especially impassioned as it were by the corners of her lips, little pale rose corners, slightly moist, and which showed the vivid red of her mouth when she smiled. She, however, did not draw away from him, but remained placid and affectionate. At the end of a brief silence she added,—

“You can’t really mean it. I am an old woman ; I’ve a big boy eight years old. What could we two do together?”

“Why!” murmured Coupeau, winking his eyes, “what the others do ! Why not?”

But she made a gesture as if she felt annoyed.

“Oh! do you think it’s always amusing? No, Monsieur Coupeau, I must think of serious things. Amusing oneself never leads to anything, you can understand? I’ve two mouths at home which are never tired of swallowing. How do you suppose I can bring up my little household if I only think of enjoying myself? And listen: besides that, my misfortune has been a famous lesson to me. You know I don’t care one straw about men now. They won’t have me in their power for a long while again.”

She expressed herself without anger, but with propriety and very coldly, as though she had been discussing a question connected with her work, giving the reasons which made her leave a habit-shirt unstarched. It could be seen that she had thoroughly made up her mind after mature reflection.

Coupeau, deeply moved, repeated,—

“You cause me much pain ; a great deal of pain.”

“Yes, I see that,” she returned, “and I am sorry for you, Monsieur Coupeau. But you mustn’t take it to heart. You look a good-natured fellow ; your nice. We might be together, I daresay, and we’d get along the best way we could. I’m not at all given to act the swell. I don’t say that it might not have been. Only what’s the use, as I’ve no desire for it? I’ve been for the last fortnight, now, at Madame Fauconnier’s. The little

ones go to school. I've work ; I'm contented. So the best is to remain as we are."

And she stooped down to take her basket.

"You make me talk ; they must be expecting me at the shop. You'll find someone else prettier than I, Monsieur Coupeau, and who won't have two monkeys to drag about with her."

He looked at the clock inserted above the mirror, and made her sit down again, exclaiming,—

"Don't be so quick. It's only half-past eleven. I've still twenty-five minutes. You needn't be afraid I shall do anything foolish. You dislike me so much that you won't stay here and have a little talk with me?"

She put her basket down again, not to disoblige him ; and they conversed like good friends. She had lunched before taking home the washing ; and he, that day, had hastily swallowed his soup and his beef, so as to watch for her. Gervaise, replying complaisantly, looked out of the window between the jars of preserved fruit, at the commotion in the street, which the luncheon hour had filled with a large concourse of people.

A group had been formed at the entrance to the Assommoir.

"I say, Bibi-the-Smoker," inquired a hoarse voice, "are you going to stand a round of vitriol?"

Five workmen entered and stood before the counter.

"Ah ! old Colombe, you thief," resumed the voice, "you know you must give us some of the old stuff, and not in nut-shells, but real glasses !"

Old Colombe quietly served them. Another company of three workmen arrived. Little by little, the men in blouses collected at the corner of the pavement, stood there for a short time, and ended by pushing each other into the saloon between the two oleanders powdered with dust.

"You're stupid !" Gervaise was saying to Coupeau. "No doubt, certainly, I loved him. Only, after the disgusting way in which he has left me—"

They were talking of Lantier. Gervaise had not seen him again ; she believed he was living at La Glaciere, in the house of the friend who was going to commence a hat factory. She had no idea of running after him. At first, his leaving her had caused her great pain—she had even wanted to drown herself ; but, now that she had reasoned the matter out, she considered that it was all for the best. Perhaps, had she continued with Lantier, she might never have been able to bring up the children, for he wasted so much money. He might come and kiss Claude and Etienne ; she would not send him from the door. Only, as far as she herself was concerned, she would be cut in pieces before she would allow him to touch her with the tips of his fingers. She said all these things with the air of a woman who was firmly resolved, having perfectly decided on her future style of life ; whilst Coupeau, who would not give way in his desire to have her, joked, and gave a double meaning to everything, asking her queer questions about Lantier so gaily, and showing such white teeth, that she did not think of being offended.

“You used to strike him,” said he at last. “Oh ! you’re not kind. You whip people.”

She interrupted him with a hearty laugh. It was true, though, she had whipped Virgine’s tall carcass. She would have strangled someone on that day. She laughed louder than ever when Coupeau told her that Virginie, ashamed of the personal disgrace, had left the neighbourhood. Her face, however, maintained a sweet, childish expression ; she held out her plump hands, saying that she would not hurt a fly ; all she knew of blows was that she had received plenty during her life. Then she went on to talk of her childhood passed at Plassans. She wasn’t a bit gaddish ; the men bored her. When Lantier took her at fourteen, she thought it nice, because he said he was her husband, and she thought they were playing at housekeeping. Her only fault, she asserted, was that she was too sensitive ; she loved every-

body, and especially those who brought her misery. For instance, when she loved a man, she had no notions of nonsense ; all she dreamed of was living together for ever and happily.

And as Coupeau, with a chuckle, spoke of her two children, she tapped him over the fingers, adding that she was no doubt, made like other women ; only people were wrong to think that women were always after that sort of thing ; women thought of their home, slaved to keep the house clean and tidy, and went to bed too tired at night not to go to sleep at once. Besides, she resembled her mother, a stout labouring woman who died at her work, and who had served as beast of burden to old Macquart for more than twenty years. She was still quite slim, whilst her mother had shoulders broad enough to break in the doorways through which she passed ; but, notwithstanding that, she resembled her by mania for becoming attached to people. And if she limped a little, she, no doubt, owed that to the poor woman whom old Macquart used to strike so cruelly. A hundred times had she told her of the nights when the old man, coming back drunk, would indulge in such brutal behaviour that he broke her limbs ; and she must surely have owed her own lameness to his behaviour on one of these occasions.

“Oh ! it’s scarcely anything ; it’s hardly perceptible,” said Coupeau politely.

She raised her chin ; she knew well enough that it could be seen ; at forty she would look as if broken in two. Then she added gently, with a slight laugh,—

“It’s a funny taste of yours to fall in love with a cripple.”

Then, with his elbows still on the table, he thrust his face closer to hers, and began complimenting her in venturesome language, as though to intoxicate her. But she continued to shake her head, declining to be tempted though caressed by his warm accents. She listened, gazing out, seeming to be again interested by the

increasing crowd. Bands of workmen were emerging from all the eating houses; big fellows with beards pushed and pommelled one another, playing together like children, with their heavy hob-nailed boots grating on the pavement as they slid about; others, with their hands at the bottoms of their pockets, stood smoking with a reflective air, gazing at the sun and blinking their eyes. It was a perfect invasion of the foot-pavement, of the roadway, and of the kennels, an idle crowd streaming from the open doorways, stopping in the midst of the vehicles, and forming an endless procession of long and short blouses, and faded and discoloured old overcoats in the bright light which filled the street. The factory bells rang in the distance, yet the workmen did not hurry themselves, but stopped to light their pipes once more; then drawing themselves up, after calling each other from the different wine-shops, they at length decided to go in the direction of the factories. Gervaise amused herself by watching three workmen, a tall fellow and two short ones, who turned to look back every few yards; they ended by descending the street, and came straight to old Colombe's Assommoir.

"Ah, well!" murmured she, "there are three fellows who don't feel inclined to do any work."

"Why," said Coupeau, I know the tall one; it's Mes-Bottes, a comrade of mine."

The Assommoir was now filling up. Everyone was talking a great deal, and the sharp accents of the shriller voices kept breaking in on the husky murmurs of the hoarser ones. Fists banged down now and again on the bar, causing the glasses to jingle.

"Hallo! it's that aristocrat young Cassis!" cried Mes-Bottes, bringing his hand down roughly on Coupeau's shoulder. "A fine gentleman, who smokes paper, and wears linen. So we want to do the 'big dog' with our sweethearts."

"Get out! don't bother me," replied Coupeau, very cross. But the other chuckled.

"Right you are. We know what's what, my boy. Muffs are muffs, no doubt about that."

He turned his back, after squinting terribly as he looked at Gervaise. She drew back, feeling rather frightened. The smoke from the pipes, the strong odour of all those men, ascended in the air, charged with the fumes of alcohol; and she felt a choking sensation, and coughed a little.

"Oh, what a beastly thing it is to drink!" said she, in a low voice. "You see," added she, pointing to her glass, "I've eaten my plum; only I must leave the juice, as it would make me ill."

Coupeau, likewise, could not understand how people could swallow full glasses of brandy. A plum now and again was not bad. As for "vitriol," absinthe, and all such dirt, good night! he would have nothing to do with them. His father, who had been a zinc-worker like himself, had cracked his head on the pavement of the Rue Coquenard through falling from the roof of No. 25, one day he had "been tight," and the recollection of that caused all the family to keep very steady. Whenever he passed along the Rue Coquenard, and saw the place, he would sooner have swallowed the water of the gutter than have drunk a tumbler of wine, though it were given to him. He concluded with these words,—

"In my trade, one must be steady on one's legs."

Gervaise had taken her basket again. She did not rise from her seat, however, but held the basket on her knees, with a dreamy look in her eyes, and lost in thought, as if the young workman's words had awakened within her far-off thoughts of life. And she said again, slowly, and without any apparent change of manner,—

"Well, God knows I'm not ambitious! I don't ask any great thing. My ideal is to work in peace, always to have bread to eat, and a decent place to sleep in, you know; with a bed, a table, and two chairs—nothing more. Ah! I should also like to be able to bring up my children, to make good men of them, if possible."

She remained thinking, interrogating her feelings, unable seemingly to find anything else of consequence which tempted her. Then, after hesitating a while she went on,—

“Yes, when one comes to the end, one might wish to die in one’s bed. For myself, after having trudged through life, I should like to die in my bed, in my own home.”

And she rose from her seat. Coupeau, who cordially approved her wishes, was already standing, anxious about the time. But they did not leave at once; she had the curiosity to go and look at the back, behind the oak barrier, at the big red copper, which was still working beneath the glass roof in the courtyard; and the zinc-worker, who had followed her, explained how it operated, pointing out with his finger the different pieces of the apparatus, and the enormous retort, from which a limpid stream of alcohol fell. The still, with its strangely-shaped receivers, its endless coils of pipes, had a sombre look; not a fume escaped from it; one could just hear a kind of internal breathing, like some rumbling underground; it was as though some night labour was being performed in the light of day by a mighty, dumb, and mournful workman.

Mes-Bottes, accompanied by his two comrades, had come and leant over the barrier, waiting until a corner of the bar was free. He had a laugh resembling the noise made by a pulley badly greased, and wagged his head as his eyes were fixed tenderly at the machine for producing drunkenness. Thunder of God! it was pretty. There was enough in that big copper arrangement to keep one’s throat moist for a week. He would have liked to have had the end of the pipe soldered between his teeth, so as to feel the still hot “vitriol” fill his body, descending towards his heels, always, always like a little waterfall. Well! he would never trouble himself about anything else then; it would be a great deal better than having to put up with that jackass, old Colombe’s thimblefuls. And his comrades chuckled, saying that that animal, Mes-

Bottes, was a great joker as well a rascal. The still, slowly, without a flame, without the least brightness in the dull reflection of its copper envelope, went on with its work, letting its alcoholic exudation flow like a sluggish and stubborn stream, which, in course of time, was to overrun the whole saloon, spread along the exterior Boulevards, and inundate the immense gulf of Paris. Gervaise, taken with a shiver, moved away ; and she tried to smile, murmuring,—

“It’s stupid ; but to look at that machine makes me grow cold ; the thought of drink makes my blood run like ice.”

Then, returning to the idea she nursed of a perfect happiness, she resumed,—

“Now, ain’t I right ? it’s much the nicest, isn’t it—to work, to have bread to eat, a home of one’s own, and to be able to bring up one’s children, and to die in one’s bed ?”

“And never to be beaten,” added Coupeau gaily. “But I would not beat you, if you would only try me, Madame Gervaise. You’ve no cause for fear. I never drink, you know, and then, I love you too much. Come, shall it be from to-day ?”

He had lowered his voice, and was whispering in her ear, whilst she, holding her basket before her, made a way for herself amongst the men. But she still said “no” with her head several times. Yet she looked round, smiled at him, and seemed pleased to know that he did not drink. She would certainly have answered “yes,” had she not sworn never again to make things up with a man. At last they reached the door, and went out. Behind them, the Assommoir still continued full, and even in the street the hoarse voices of the customers could be heard, whilst they still breathed the spirituous odour of the “vitriol.” Mes-Bottes was calling old Colombe a cheat, and accusing him of having only half filled his glass. He was a good fellow, a larky one, a fellow who was up to anything. The foreman might go

mad, but he was not going back to the shed, he had had enough work. And he proposed to his two comrades that they should go off to the "Little Old Man with a Cough," a boozing-ken in the Barriere Saint-Denis, where they gave you the right stuff, pure.

"Ah ! I can breathe here," said Gervaise on the pavement. "Well, good-bye, and thank you, Monsieur Coupeau. I must hurry back."

And she was about to pass along the Boulevard. But he had taken her hand, and held it, as he said,—

"Go round with me by the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or, it will scarcely be any farther for you. I must call on my sister before returning to work. We can keep each other company."

She ended by agreeing, and they slowly ascended the Rue des Poissonniers side by side, without taking each other's arms. He talked of his relations. His mother, old mother Coupeau, used to make waistcoats, but her eyes were failing her ; she had now become a charwoman. She was sixty-two on the third of the previous month. He was the youngest. One of his sisters, Madame Lerat, a widow of thirty-six, worked at artificial flower making, and lived in the Rue des Moines, at Batignolles. The other, aged thirty, had married a gold chain maker, that sly, malicious beggar, Lorilleux. It was on her that he was going to call in the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. She lived in the big house on the left. Every evening he took dinner with the Lorilleux ; it was a saving for all the three. Indeed, he was just going to tell them not to expect him that evening, as he had been invited by a friend. Gervaise, who had listened to him, suddenly interrupted him to ask, with a smile,—

"So you're called 'Young Cassis,' Monsieur Coupeau?"

"Oh !" replied he, "it's a nickname my mates have given me, because I generally drink 'cassis' when they force me to go with them to the wine-shop. It's no worse to be called Young Cassis than Mes-Bottes, is it?"

"Of course not. Young Cassis isn't an ugly nickname," the young woman declared.

"You know," said he, "I can see the Hotel Boncœur when I'm up there. Yesterday you were at the window, and I waved my arms, but you didn't observe me."

They had already gone about a hundred paces along the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or when he stopped, and, raising his eyes, said,—

"That's the house. I was born farther on, at No. 22. But this house is, all the same, a fine block of masonry. It's like a barrack inside."

Gervaise raised her chin, and examined the frontage. The house had five storeys looking on the street, and each of them had a row of fifteen windows, the shutters of which, black, and broken in many places, gave an air of ruin to that immense mass of wall.

"Come in," said Coupeau, "no one will eat you."

Gervaise wanted to wait for him in the street. However she could not resist going through the porch as far as the *concierge's* room on the right. And there, on the threshold, she again raised her eyes. Inside, the façades had six storeys—four regular façades enclosing the vast square of the courtyard. The grey walls, partly eaten away by a yellow leprosy, were streaked by the drippings from the slates, and were perfectly flat from the pavement to the roof, without the least moulding; the water pipes alone curved a little at each floor, where the open sinks were seen, covered with rust. The windows, without shutters, displayed their bare panes, of the greenish hue of dirty water. At certain windows, mattresses covered with blue check were hanging out to air; in front of others, clothes were drying on lines, all the washing of a household—the man's shirts, the wife's nightdresses, and the children's frocks; at one window, on the third floor, were a baby's soiled napkins. From the top to the bottom, the lodgings, too small for their inhabitants, seemed to be bursting, showing scraps of their misery in every crack.

"Is madame seeking for anyone?" called out the in-

quisitive doorkeeper, appearing at the entrance of her lodge.

The young woman explained that she was waiting for a friend. She returned to the street; then, as Coupeau did not come, she went back to the courtyard, having a desire to take another look. The house did not appear ugly to her.

"I've kept you waiting rather a long time," said Coupeau whom she suddenly heard close beside her. "There is always such a talk whenever I don't dine with them, and it was worse than usual to-day, as my sister had bought some veal."

And as Gervaise had slightly started with surprise, he continued, glancing round in his turn,—

"You were looking at the house. It's always all let from the top to the bottom. There are three hundred lodgers, I think. If I had had any furniture, I would have secured a small room. One would be pretty well here; don't you think so?"

"Yes, one would be comfortable," murmured Gervaise. "In our street at Plassans there weren't nearly so many people. Look, that's pretty, isn't it?—that window up on the fifth floor, with the scarlet runners."

Then he determinedly asked her again whether she would consent. As soon as they had a bed, they would rent a room there. But she hastened away, passing hurriedly beneath the porch, and begging him not to recommence his chaff. Coupeau, however, as he left her at Madame l'auconnier's door, was able for an instant to hold her hand, as she abandoned it to him in complete friendship.

For a month the young woman and the zinc-worker were the best of friends. He admired her courage, when he beheld her half killing herself with work, keeping her children, and yet finding time at night to sew a little. Coupeau, who always joked about everything, did not trouble himself regarding the future. One day followed another, of course! One could always manage to have a

nest, and something to eat. The neighbourhood was a decent one, excepting for a few drunkards, whom it might be well to clear from the gutters. He was not a bad devil; he sometimes talked very sensible, was a trifle coquettish, parted his hair carefully on the side, wore pretty neckties and a pair of patent leather shoes on Sundays. With all that, he was as sharp and as impudent as a monkey, full of jokes like most Parisian workmen, and with a wagging tongue pleasant enough in a young fellow like him.

They had ended by rendering each other all sorts of services at the Hotel Boncœur. Coupeau fetched her milk, ran her errands, carried her bundles of clothes; often of an evening, as he got home first from work, he took the children for a walk on the exterior Boulevard. Gervaise, in return for his polite attentions, would go up into the narrow room under the tiles where he slept, and see to his clothes, sewing buttons on his trousers, and mending his linen jackets. A great familiarity was established between them. She was never dull when he was there. Amused with the songs he sang, and the continual larking of the Paris faubourgs, which was all new to her. He was caught, and firmly, too! It ended by making him very uncomfortable. He still laughed; but he was so upset, and so oppressed, that it was no longer funny. The chaff continued. He could never meet her without asking, "When's it to be?" She knew what he meant, and promised her consent when the same week had four Thursdays in it. Then he would tease her; would go to her room with his slippers in his hand, as though coming to stay with her. She also joked with him about it, and could pass the day without a blush amidst the continual pointed allusions with which he surrounded her life. She bore anything so long as he was not rough. She only got angry on one occasion when he, wishing to snatch a kiss from her, had pulled out some of her hair.

Towards the end of June, Coupeau lost his liveliness. He was quite out of sorts. Gervaise, feeling uneasy at

some of his glances, barricaded herself in at night. Then, after an attack of the sulks lasting since the Sunday, he suddenly came on the Tuesday night about eleven o'clock and knocked at her room. She would not open to him; but his voice was so gentle and so trembling that she ended by withdrawing the chest of drawers she had pushed against the door. When he had entered, she thought he was ill; he looked so pale, his eyes were so red, and the veins on his face were all swollen. And he remained standing, stuttering and shaking his head. No, no, he was not ill. He had been crying for two hours, upstairs in his room; he wept like a child, biting his pillow so as not to be heard by the neighbours. For three nights past he had been unable to sleep. It could not go on like that.

"Listen, Madame Grevaize," said he, his throat swelling, and on the point of bursting out crying again; "we must end this. We'll go and get married. I'm willing. I am quite decided."

Grevaize showed great surprise. She was very grave.

"Oh! Monsieur Coupeau," murmured she, "what is this you are thinking of? You know well I've never asked you for such a thing. I didn't care about it—that was all. Oh no, no! it's serious now; reflect, I beg of you."

But he continued to shake his head, with an air of unalterable resolution. He had already reflected. He had come down because he wanted to have a good night. She wasn't going to send him back to weep again, was she? As soon as she had said "yes," he would no longer torment her, and she could go quietly to sleep. He only wanted to hear her say "yes." They could talk it over in the morning.

"But I certainly can't say 'yes' like that," resumed Gervaise. I don't want you to be able to accuse me later on of having incited you to do a stupid thing. You see, Monsieur Coupeau, it's wrong of you to be so obstinate. You don't know yourself what your real feelings are for me. If you didn't see me for a week, you'd get

all right again, I bet. Men often marry for a night—the first one; and then the nights follow on, the days succeed each other, for the rest of their lives, and they're thoroughly bored. Sit down there; I'm quite willing to talk it over at once."

He would never find another woman so courageous, so kind, so full of good points. Besides, all that was nothing; she might have rolled about the streets, have been ugly, idle, disgusting, and have had a troop of dirty brats—it would have been nothing in his eyes. He wished her to be his.

"Yes, I want you," he repeated, bringing his hand down on his knee like a continuous hammering. "You understand, I want you. There's nothing to be said against that, is there?"

Little by little, Gervaise gave way. A cowardliness of the heart and senses overtook her, in the midst of that passionate desire with which she felt herself enveloped. She only ventured on the most timid objections, her hands lying idly in her lap, a look of sweetness on her face. From the outside, through the open window, the beautiful June night wafted in a warm breeze, flickering the candle, whose long wick was burning as black as a cinder. Coupeau, seeing the young woman had come to the end of her arguments, and that she was silent and smiling vaguely, seized her hands and drew her toward him. She was in one of those moments of abandonment which she so much dreaded—conquered, and too deeply moved to refuse anything and cause pain to anyone.

"You'll say 'yes'; shall it not be so?" asked he.

"How you do tease me!" she murmured. "You wish it? Well, then, yes. Ah! we're perhaps doing a very foolish thing,"

He jumped up, and, seizing her round the waist, kissed her roughly on the face, at random. Then, as this caress caused a noise, he became anxious, and went softly and looked at Claude and Etienne, stepping like a wolf, and lowering his voice,

"Hush ! we must be good," said he, "and not wake the brats. Good-bye till to-morrow."

And he went back to his room. Gervaise, all in a tremble, remained seated on the edge of her bed for nearly an hour, without thinking of undressing herself. She was touched ; she considered Coupeau was very honourable ; for at one moment she had really thought it was all over, and that he would be troublesome. The drunkard below, under the window, was now hoarsely uttering the cry of some lost animal. The violin in the distance had left off its vulgar tune, and was now silent.

During the following days, Coupeau sought to get Gervaise to call some evening on his sister in the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or ; but the young woman, who was very timid, showed a great dread of this visit to the Lorilleux. She saw perfectly well that the zinc-worker was afraid of them in a sort of way. Yet he was in nowise dependent on his sister, who was not the eldest. Mother Coupeau would freely give her consent, for she never thwarted her son. Only, the Lorilleux had the reputation among the family of earning as much as ten francs a day ; and on that ground they exercised a special authority. Coupeau would not dare to marry unless they should accept his wife beforehand.

"I have spoken to them of you ; they know our plans," he explained to Gervaise. "Come, now, what a baby you are ! We shall go this evening. I've warned you, haven't I ? You'll find my sister rather stiff. Lorilleux, too, isn't always very amiable. In reality, they are much annoyed, because if I marry, I shall no longer take my meals with them, and that will be less economical. But that doesn't matter ; they won't turn you from the door. Do this for me ; it's absolutely necessary."

These words only frightened Gervaise the more. One Saturday evening, however, she yielded. Coupeau came for her at half-past eight. She was dressed in a black dress, a crape shawl with yellow palms, and a white cap trimmed with a little cheap lace. During the six weeks

water, through which the lamp shed a circle of bright light over his labours.

"Take chairs!" called out Madame Lorilleux in her turn. "It's that lady, isn't it? Very well, very well!"

She had rolled the wire, she carried it to the forge, and then, blowing up the fire of the brazier, with a large wooden fan, she proceeded to temper the wire before passing it through the last holes of the draw-plate.

Coupeau brought the two chairs, and seated Gervaise close to the curtain. The room was so narrow that there was not room for him to sit beside her. So he placed his chair a little behind hers, and bent forward to give her explanations of the work. The young woman, put out by the strange reception given her by the Lorilleux, feeling uneasy beneath their sidelong glances, had a singing in her ears which prevented her from hearing. She thought the woman looked very old to be only thirty, with her cross-grained manner, her dirty appearance, and her hair rolled together, looking like a cow's tail as it hung over her unfastened linen jacket. The husband, only a year older than his wife, appeared quite an old man, with his thin, bad-looking lips, as he sat there in his shirt-sleeves, and his naked feet in a pair of old down-at-heel slippers. But what disheartened her the most was the smallness of the workroom, the besmeared walls, the tarnished metal tools, all the black dirt hanging about amongst the miscellaneous collection of a dealer in old iron. It was terribly hot. Beads of perspiration hung about the man's greenish face, whilst Madame Lorilleux ended by taking off her loose linen jacket, exposing her bare arms, and her chemise clinging to her sunken breasts.

"And the gold?" asked Gervaise, in a low voice.

Her anxious glances searched the corners, and sought amongst all that filth for the magnificence she had dreamt of. But Coupeau burst out laughing.

"Gold?" said he; "why, there's some, there's some more, and there's some at your feet."

Lorilleux, seized with a fit of coughing, almost doubled up on his stool. In the midst of the attack he spoke, and said in a choking voice, but not yet looking at Gervaise, as though he was merely speaking of the thing to himself,—

“I’m making the herring-bone chain.”

Coupeau made Gervaise, get up. She might draw nearer and see. The chain-maker consented with a grunt.

“That’s the herring-bone chain,” said Coupeau. “There’s also the long link, the cable, the plain ring, and the spiral. But that’s the herring bone. Lorilleux makes the herring-bone chain only.”

The goldsmith chuckled with satisfaction. He exclaimed, as he continued squeezing the links, invisible between his dirty finger-nails,—

“Listen to me, Young Cassis! I was making a calculation this morning. I commenced work when I was twelve years old, you know. Well! can you guess how long would be the herring-bone chain I must have made up till to-day?”

He raised his pale face and blinked his red eyelids.

“Twenty-six thousand feet, do you hear? Two leagues! That’s something, isn’t it? a herring bone chain two leagues long! It’s enough to twist round the necks of all the women about this district. And you know, it’s still increasing. I hope to make it long enough to reach from Paris to Versailles.”

Gervaise had returned to her seat, disenchanted, and thinking all she had seen very ugly. She smiled just to please the Lorilleux. What most made her feel ill at ease was the silence maintained about her marriage, that most important matter to her, and but for which she never would certainly have been there. The Lorilleux continued to treat her as an unwelcome, inquisitive person brought by Coupeau.

“Look, here’s one,” said Lorilleux to his wife, giving her the piece of chain he had been working at ever since

his lunch. "You can trim it." And he added, with the persistence of a man who does not easily relinquish a joke: "Another four feet and a half. That brings me nearer to Versailles."

Then Madame Lorilleux, after tempering it again, trimmed it by passing it through the regulating draw-plate. She next put it in a little copper saucepan with a long handle, full of lye-water, and placed it over the fire of the forge. Gervaise, again pushed forward by Coupeau, had to follow this last operation. When the chain was thoroughly cleansed, it appeared a dull red colour. It was finished and ready to be delivered.

"They're sent back like that, in their rough state," the zinc-worker explained. "The polishers rub them afterwards with cloths."

But Gervaise felt her courage failing her. The heat, more and more intense, was suffocating her. They kept the door shut, because Lorilleux caught cold from the least draught. Then, as they had not yet spoken of the marriage, she wanted to go away, and gently pulled Coupeau's jacket. He understood. He, moreover, also was beginning to feel ill at ease and vexed at this affectation of silence.

"Well, we shall go," said he. "We shall leave you to your work."

He moved about for a moment, waiting, hoping for a word, or some allusion or other. At length he decided to open the subject himself.

"I say, Lorilleux, we're counting on you; you'll be the witness for my wife."

The chain-maker raised his head, and chuckled as if greatly surprised; whilst his wife, leaving her draw-plates, came into the middle of the work-room.

"So it's serious then," he murmured. "That confounded Young Cassis, one never knows whether he is in fun or not."

"Ah! yes, madame's the person," said the wife in her turn, as she stared fully at Gervaise. "Good Heaven!

we've no advice to give you, we haven't. It's a funny idea to get married, all the same. Anyhow, it's your own concern, each of you. When it doesn't succeed, one's only oneself to blame, that's all. And it doesn't often succeed, not often, not often."

She said these last words slower and slower, and shaking her head, she looked from the young woman's face to her hands, as though she had wished to undress her, and see the very pores of her skin. She must have found her better than she expected.

"My brother is quite free," she continued, in a more constrained tone. "No doubt, the family might have wished—one always makes projects. But things turn out so queerly. For myself, I don't want to dispute the matter. Had he brought us the lowest of the low, I should merely have said: 'Marry her and leave us in peace!' He was not badly off though, here, with us. He's fat enough; one can very well see he didn't fast much; and he always had his soup hot, at the very minute.

"You've got two children, madame? Now, I must say I remarked to my brother: 'I can't understand how you can marry a woman who's got two children.' You mustn't be offended if I consult his interests; it's only natural. You don't look very strong, either. Don't you think, Lorilleux, madame doesn't look very strong?"

"No, no, she's not strong."

They said nothing about her leg; but Gervaise understood by the side glances, and the curling of their lips, that they referred to it. She stood before them, wrapped in her thin shawl with the yellow palms, replying in monosyllables, as if she were before her judges. Coupeau, seeing she was suffering, ended by exclaiming,—

"All that has nothing to do with it. The wedding will take place on Saturday, July 29. I calculated by the almanac. Is it settled? Does it suit you?"

"Oh, it's all the same to us," said his sister. "You

didn't need to consult us. I shan't prevent Lorilleux from being witness. I only want to have peace."

"Gervaise, hanging her head, not knowing what to do with herself, had put the toe of her boot through one of the openings in the wooden screen which covered the tiled floor of the work-room; then, afraid of having disturbed something when she withdrew it, she stooped down and felt with her hand. Lorilleux hastily brought the lamp, and examined her fingers suspiciously.

"You must be careful," said he; "the tiny morsels of gold stick to the shoes, and get carried away without one knowing it."

There was quite a talk over this. The masters did not allow a milligram for waste; and he showed the hare's foot, with which he brushed up the particles of gold remaining on the block, and the skin spread over his knees, placed there purposely to receive them. Twice a week the work-room was carefully swept out; they collected all the filth and burnt it, and then sifted the ashes, in which they found every month from twenty-five to thirty francs' worth of gold. Madame Lorilleux did not take her eyes off Gervaise's shoes.

"There's no occasion to get angry," murmured she, with an amiable smile. "Perhaps madame would not object to look at the soles of her shoes?"

And Gervaise, very red, sat down again, and, holding up her feet, showed that there was nothing clinging to them. Coupeau had opened the door exclaiming,— "Good night!" in an abrupt tone of voice. He called to her from the passage. Then she in her turn went off, after stammering a few polite words: she hoped to see them again, and that they would all get on well together.

When Gervaise went out from the corridor on to the landing of the sixth floor, she could not help saying, with tears in her eyes,—

"That doesn't promise much happiness."

Coupeau shook his head furiously. Lorilleux should smart for that evening. Had anyone ever seen such a

miserly fellow ? to think that they were going to walk off with two or three grains of his gold dust. All the commotion they made was from pure avarice. His sister thought, perhaps, that he would never marry, so as to enable her to economise four sous on her dinner every day. However, it would take place all the same on July 29. He did not care twopence for them !

But Gervaise, as they went downstairs, felt heavy at heart, and troubled with a foolish fear, which made her anxiously examine all the dark shadows of the staircase.

CHAPTER III

GERVAISE did not want to have guests at her wedding. What was the use of spending money? Besides, she felt somewhat ashamed; it seemed to her quite unnecessary to show off her marriage before the whole neighbourhood. But Coupeau exclaimed against this. One could not be married without having a "spread." He did not care twopence for the people of the neighbourhood! Oh!, merely something very simple—a little drive in the afternoon, previous to going and having a bit of rabbit or such like at any eating-house. And no music at dessert, certainly not; no clarionet to make the ladies dance. A matter of having a few drinks together before going home, by-by, each to his own diggings.

The zinc-worker, chaffing and joking, at length got the young woman to consent, on promising her that there should be no practical jests. He would keep his eye on the glasses, to prevent sunstrokes. Then he organised a picnic at five francs a head, at the "Silver Windmill," kept by Auguste, on the Boulevard de la Chapelle. He was a small vintner, of moderate charges, and had a dancing place behind his back shop, beneath the three acacias in his courtyard. They would be very comfortable on the first floor. In ten days' time he got hold of guests in the house where his sister lived in the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or—M. Madinier, Mademoiselle Remanjou, Madame Gaudron, and her husband. He even ended by getting Gervaise to consent to the presence of two of his comrades—Bibi-the-Smoker, and Mes-Bottes. No doubt

Mes-Bottes "raised his elbow ;" but then he had such a queer appetite that he was always asked to join these sort of picnics, just for the sight of the purveyor's face, when he beheld that bottomless pit swallowing his twelve pounds of bread. The young woman, on her side, promised to bring her employer, Madame Fauconnier, and the Boches, very agreeable people. They found, on reckoning, there would be fifteen to sit down to the table, which was quite enough.

Coupeau, however, hadn't a penny. Without wishing to do the stylish, he intended to behave handsomely. He borrowed fifty francs of his employer. Out of that, he first of all purchased the wedding-ring—a twelve-franc gold wedding-ring, which Lorilleux procured for him wholesale for nine francs. He then bought himself a frock coat, a pair of trousers, and a waistcoat, at a tailor's in the Rue Myrrha, to whom he gave merely twenty-five francs on account ; his patent leather shoes and his hat would do well enough. When he had put by the ten francs for his and Gervaise's share of the feast—the two children not being charged for—he had exactly six francs left—the price of a mass at the altar of the poor. He certainly didn't like the priests, and it almost broke his heart to take his six francs to those gormandisers, who had no need of his money to keep their throats moist. But a marriage without a mass is, whatever one may say, no marriage at all. He went to the church to make a bargain ; and for an hour he argued with a little old priest in a dirty cassock, and who ended by letting him have his mass for five francs. It was twenty sous saved, and that was all the money that was left him.

Gervaise also wanted to look respectable. As soon as the marriage was settled she made her arrangements, worked extra time in the evenings, and managed to put thirty francs aside. She had a great desire for a little silk mantle marked thirteen francs in the Rue du Faubourg-Poissonniere. She treated herself to it, and

then bought for ten francs of the husband of a washer-woman who had died in Madame Fauconnier's house a blue woollen dress, which she altered so as to fit herself. With the seven francs remaining she bought a pair of cotton gloves, a rose for her cap, and a pair of shoes for Claude, her eldest boy. Fortunately, the youngsters' blouses would do well enough. She spent four nights cleaning everything, and mending the smallest holes in her stockings and clothes.

On the Friday night, the eve of the great day. Gervaise and Coupeau had still a good deal of running up and down to do up till eleven o'clock, after returning home from their work. Then, before separating for the night, they spent an hour together in the young woman's chamber, happy that their awkward position was soon to cease. Coupeau's witnesses were to be M. Madinier and Bibi-the-Smoker; whilst Gervaise counted on Lorilleux and Boche. The six of them were to go quietly to the mayor's, and to the church, without bringing a number of other people behind them. The bridegroom's two sisters had even declared that they would stay at home, their presence not being at all necessary. Mother Coupeau alone had burst out into tears, saying that, sooner than not be there, she would go before them and hide herself in a corner; and so they promised to take her. As for the meeting of the whole wedding party, it was fixed for one o'clock, at the "Silver Windmill." From there they would go and get up an appetite on the plain of Saint-Denis; they would go by train, and return on foot along the high road. The gathering promised to be a very pleasant one, not a wholesale spree, but a bit of fun—something nice and respectable.

The marriage at the mayor's was to take place at half-past ten. It was beautiful weather—though there was a storm-presaging sun which seemed roasting the streets. So as not to be stared at, the bride and bridegroom, the old mother, and the four witnesses separated into two bands. Gervaise walked first with Lorilleux, who gave

her his arm ; whilst M. Madinier followed with mother Coupeau. Then, twenty steps behind, on the other pavement, came Coupeau, Boche, and Bibi-the-Smoker. These three were in black frock coats, walking erect, and swinging their arms about. Boche had on a pair of yellow trousers ; Bibi-the-Smoker, buttoned up to his neck, but without a waistcoat, showed only a bit of neckerchief rolled round like a twisted rope. M. Madinier alone wore a dress coat—a big dress coat, with square-cut tails ; and the passers-by stopped to look at the gentleman who escorted fat mother Coupeau, in a green shawl, and a black cap with red ribbons. Gervaise, very gentle and gay, in her blue dress, her shoulders tightly enveloped in her scanty little mantle, listened with a pleased air to the chucklings indulged in by Lorillerx, lost in the midst of an immense overcoat, in spite of the heat ; now and again, at the street corners, she slightly turned her head, and threw a knowing smile at Coupeau, who felt uncomfortable in his new clothes, shining in the sun.

Though they walked very slowly, they arrived at the mayor's fully half an hour too soon. And as the mayor was late, their turn was not reached till close upon eleven o'clock. When the magistrate appeared they all rose respectfully. They were, however, beckoned to resume their seats. Then they assisted at three marriages, lost amongst three middle-class wedding parties, with brides dressed in white, little girls with their hair in curls, young ladies wearing pink sashes, and interminable processions of ladies and gentlemen all dressed in their very best, and looking highly respectable. And at last they were called.

It was a considerable distance from the mayor's to the church. On the way the men had some beer, whilst mother Coupeau and Gervaise took some "cassis" and water. And they had to follow a long street, along which the sun shone fiercely, without leaving the least particle of shade. The beadle was waiting for them in

the middle of the empty church; he pushed them towards a little chapel, asking them with some show of anger whether it was to show their contempt for religion that they had arrived so late. A priest looking sulky, his face pale with hunger, advanced with great strides, preceded by a clerk, who trotted along in a dirty surplice. The priest hurried through the mass, gobbling up the Latin phrases, turning about, stooping, spreading out his arms all in great haste, and with side glances at the bride and bridegroom and their witnesses. In front of the altar, the bride and bridegroom, feeling very ill at ease, not knowing when they had to kneel, when to stand up, when to sit down, waited for signs from the clerk. The witnesses, in order to be quite correct, stood up all the time; whilst mother Coupeau, again seized with a fit of weeping, dropped her tears into the service-book, which she had borrowed from a neighbour. However, twelve o'clock had struck, the last mass had been said, and the church gradually resounded with the tread of the sacristan's footsteps, and the noise of chairs being put back in their places. The high altar was evidently being got ready for some grand *fete*, for one could hear the hammers of the upholsterers nailing up the hangings. And in the depths of the out-of-the-way chapel, amidst the dust roused by the beadle who was sweeping round the floor, the priest with the sulky look passed his skinny hands over Gervaise's and Coupeau's bent heads, and seemed to be uniting them in the midst of a removal, during an absence of the good God, between two solemn masses. When the wedding party again signed a register in the vestry, and were once more out in the sunshine beneath the porch, they stood there for a moment bewildered, and all out of breath at having been despatched so quickly.

"There!" said Coupeau, with an uneasy laugh.

He wriggled himself about, unable to find anything funny to say. However, he added,—

"Well, it doesn't take long. They do it in double

quick time. It's like at the dentist's; you've no time to call 'ouf!' They marry without pain."

"Yes, yes; it's a fine piece of work," murmured Lorilleux, chuckling. "You're joined in five minutes, and that holds you tight for the rest of your life. Ah! poor Young Cassis! Alas!"

And the four witnesses patted the zinc-worker on the shoulders, whilst he drew himself up. During this time Gervaise smilingly embraced mother Coupeau, with her eyes full of tears. In answer to the old woman's broken words, she said,—

"Don't be afraid; I shall do my best. If anything goes wrong, it won't be my fault. No, that's very certain; I have too great a desire to be happy. However, it's done now, isn't it? It's for him and me to agree together, and do our best to help each other."

Then they went straight to the "Silver Windmill." Coupeau had taken his wife's arm. They walked quickly, laughing as though much excited, about two hundred steps before the others, without noticing the houses, or the passers-by, or the carriages. The deafening noises of the faubourg sounded like bells in their ears. When they reached the wine-shop, Coupeau at once ordered two bottles of wine, bread, and a few slices of ham, to be served in the little glazed closet on the ground floor, without plates or table cloth, simply as a snack. Then, seeing that Boche and Bibi-the Smoker appeared to be really hungry, he ordered a third bottle, and a piece of Brie cheese.

It was now one o'clock, and the remaining guests began to arrive. Madame Fauconnier, a fat woman, still good looking, first came in; she wore a chintz-flowered dress, a pink tie, and a cap over-trimmed with flowers. Next came Mademoiselle Remanjou, looking very thin in the eternal black dress which she seemed to keep on even when she went to sleep; and the two Guadrons—the husband, like some heavy animal, and almost bursting his brown jacket at the slightest move-

ment ; the wife, a very big woman, whose figure presented plain signs of an approaching maternity, and whose stiff violet-coloured skirt still more increased her roundness of shape. Coupeau explained that they were not to wait for Mes-Bottes ; his comrade would join the party on the Route de Saint-Denis.

" Well," exclaimed Madame Lerat, as she entered, " we shall be soured with rain soon ! "

And she called the good people to the door of the wine-shop to see the clouds as black as ink which were rising rapidly to the south of Paris. Madame Lerat, the eldest of the Coupeaus, was a tall, lean, masculine woman, who talked through her nose, and was slovenly attired in a puce-coloured dress, too large for her, the long fringe on which made her resemble a thin poodle just emerged from the water. She handled her parasol as if it were a stick. When she had kissed Gervaise, she resumed,—

" You've no idea, it's as hot as flames in the street. It's just as though fire was being thrown in your face." .

Everyone then declared that they had felt the storm coming on for a long while. When they came out of church, M. Madinier had seen quite well what they had to expect. Lorilleux declared that his corns had kept him awake since three o'clock that morning. Besides, it could not finish otherwise ; the last three days had been really too warm.

" Oh ! perhaps it will pass over," remarked Coupeau, standing in the doorway, anxiously looking at the sky. " We're only waiting for my sister ; if she would make haste and come, we might start at once."

Madame Lorilleux was indeed behind time. Madame Lerat had called in upon her so that they might come together ; but, as she found her putting on her stays, they had had a disagreeable squabble. The tall widow added in her brother's ear,—

" I just left her there. She's in such a temper. You'll see what a face she has."

And the wedding party had to wait a quarter of an hour

longer, walking about the wine-shop, elbowed and jostled in the midst of the men who entered to drink a glass of wine at the bar. Now and again Boche, or Madame Fauconnier, or Bibi-the-Smoker left the others, and went into the middle of the street, looking up at the sky. The storm was not passing over at all ; a darkness was coming on, and puffs of wind sweeping along the ground, raised little clouds of white dust. At the first growl of the thunder, Mademoiselle Remanjou made the sign of the cross. All the glances were anxiously directed to the clock over the looking glass : it was twenty minutes to two.

"Go it!" cried Coupeau. "It's the angels who're weeping."

A gush of rain swept the pavement, along which some women flew, holding down their dresses with both hands. And it was in the midst of this first shower that Madame Lorilleux at length arrived, furious and out of breath, and struggling on the threshold with her umbrella, which she couldn't shut.

"Did anyone ever see such a thing?" she exclaimed. "It caught me just at the door. I felt inclined to go upstairs again, and take my things off. It would have been wise of me if I had done so. Ah! it's a pretty wedding indeed. I said how it would be. I wanted to put it off till next Saturday; and it rains because they wouldn't listen to me. So much the better, so much the better! I wish the sky would burst."

Coupeau tried to pacify her. But she sent him off "with a flea in his ear." He would not pay for her dress if it were spoilt. She had on a black silk dress, in which she was almost stifling, the body, too tight fitting, was nearly bursting the button-holes, and was cutting her across the shoulders; while the skirt allowed her to make only very short steps in walking. Yet the other ladies of the party looked at her, pursing their lips, and seemingly much struck by her costume. She did not even appear to see Gervaise seated beside mother Coupeau. She called Lorilleux and asked him for his handkerchief; then,

going into a corner of the shop, she carefully wiped off the drops of rain one by one which had fallen on the silk.

The shower had ceased all at once. The darkness increased; it was almost like night—a livid night rent at times by large flashes of lightning. Bibi-the-Smoker said, by way of a joke, that it would certainly rain priests. Then the storm burst forth with extreme violence. For half an hour the rain came down in bucketsful, and the thunder growled without cessation. The men standing before the door contemplated the grey veil of the downpour, the swollen gutters, the splashes of water that were made by the rain beating into the puddles. The women, feeling frightened, had sat down again, holding their hands in front of their eyes. They no longer talked, they were so much put out. A jest hazarded by Boche about the thunder, saying that Saint Peter was sneezing up there, failed to raise a smile. But, when the thunder was less seldom heard, and gradually died away in the distance, the wedding guests began to get impatient, raging against the storm, cursing and shaking their fists at the clouds. A fine and interminable rain poured down from the sky, which had become of an ashen hue.

“It’s past two o’clock,” cried Madame Lorilleux, “and we can’t stop here for ever.”

“If that animal Mes-Bottes is waiting for us on the Route de Saint-Denis, he won’t receive a sunstroke to-day.”

That made some of them laugh; but the general ill-humour increased. It was becoming absurd at length. They must decide on something. They could not possibly mean to go on looking at the whites of each other’s eyes until the dinner hour arrived. Then, for some little while, in face of the obstinate shower, they all puzzled their brains as to what they should do. Madame Lorilleux, after a while, said she was off. That’s what she was going to do. Were they trying to make a fool of

her? She had dressed herself, she had got wet with the rain, and all that merely to go and moon about inside a wine-shop! No, no! she had had enough of a wedding like that, she preferred her own home. Coupeau and Lorilleux had to place themselves in front of the door. She kept repeating,—

“Move away from there. I tell you I’m going home.”

Her husband having succeeded in calming her, Coupeau went up to Gervaise, who was still quietly sitting in her corner, conversing with her mother-in-law and Madame Fauconnier.

“But you don’t suggest anything,” said he, affectionately to his wife.

“Oh! anything one likes,” she replied, with a laugh. “I’m easy to please. Let us go out, or stay in, it’s all the same to me. I’m very comfortable. I don’t ask for anything more.”

And, indeed, her face was all beaming with a peaceful joy. Ever since the guests had been there, she had spoken to each of them in a rather low and tremulous voice in a sensible manner, and without taking part in any of the disputes.

M. Madinier had, up to this time, not proposed anything. He was leaning against the bar, with the tails of his dress-coat thrust apart, while he fully maintained the important air of an employer. He kept on expectorating, and rolled his big eyes about.

“Goodness gracious!” said he, “we might go to the Museum.”

And he stroked his chin, and consulted with his eyes the other members of the party.

“There were antiquities, pictures, paintings, a whole heap of things. It is very instructive. Perhaps you have never been there. Oh! it is well worth seeing—at least once in a way.”

The wedding guests looked at each other interrogatively. No, Gervaise had never been there; Madame Fauconnier neither, nor Boche, nor the others. Coupeau

thought he had been one Sunday, but he could not be sure. They hesitated, however, when Madame Lorilleux, greatly impressed by M. Madinier's importance, thought the suggestion a very proper and respectable one. As they were "putting in" the day, and were all dressed, they might as well go somewhere for their own improvement. Everyone approved. Then, as it still rained a little, they borrowed some umbrellas from the proprietor of the wine-shop, old umbrellas of blue, green, and brown, forgotten by different customers, and started off for the Museum.

The party turned then to the right, and descended into Paris along the Faubourg Saint-Denis. Coupeau and Gervaise again took the lead, almost running, and keeping a considerable distance in front of the others. M. Madinier now gave his arm to Madame Lorilleux, mother Coupeau having remained behind in the wine-shop on account of her stiff legs. Then came Lorilleux and Madame Legt, Boche and Madame Fouconnier, Bibi-the-Smoker, and Mademoiselle Remanjou, and lastly the two Gaudrons. They were twelve, and made a pretty long procession on the pavement.

"Oh! I can assure you we had nothing whatever to do with it!" exclaimed Madame Lorilleux to M. Madinier. "We don't know where he picked her up, or rather we know only too much about that; but it's not for us to say anything, is it? My husband had to buy the very wedding ring. This morning, before we were scarcely out of bed, we were obliged to lend them ten francs, otherwise here would have been nothing more of it. A bride who doesn't invite a single one of her relations to her wedding! She says she has a sister in Paris who keeps a pork-butcher's shop. Why didn't she bring her then?"

She interrupted herself to point to Gervaise, whom the sloping pavement caused to limp considerably.

"Look at her! Can it be possible? Oh! the hobbler!"

And this word "Hobler" passed from one to another. Lorilleux said with a chuckle, that they ought to nickname

her so. But Madame Fauconnier took Gervaise's part; they were wrong to poke fun at her, she was as clean as a newly-coined sou, and could do no end of work when necessary. Madame Lerat, always ready with doubtful allusions, called the little woman's leg a "love skittle"; and, she added, that many men were fond of them, without being willing to enter into any further explanation of her jest.

The wedding-party, emerging from the Faubourg Saint-Denis, crossed the Boulevard. The passers-by hastened to obtain a look at them, whilst the shopmen stood amused behind their windows. In the midst of the movement of the crowd, the couples marching in procession presented striking contrasts against the grey damp background of the Boulevards; Gervaise's coarse blue dress, Madame Fauconnier's flowery chintz, Boche's canary yellow trousers; the stiffness seen in persons who have put on their Sunday best, imparted a most ludicrous air to Coupeau's shining frock-coat, and M. Madinier's square-cut garment; whilst the elegant costume which bedecked Madame Lorilleux, the long fringe worn by Madame Lerat, and Mademoiselle Remanjou's rumpled skirts, mixed up the fashions together, and showed the tawdry luxury of the poor. But it was more especially the gentlemen's hats which amused the crowd—old-fashioned hats, that had been carefully put away, and had become tarnished in the obscurity of the wardrobes; all of them being of the most ridiculous shapes—tall, broad, pointed, with remarkable brims, either turned up or flat, and either too broad or too narrow. And the smiles increased still more when, right behind, forming the close of the spectacle, Madame Gaudron, the carder, advanced in her stiff violet-coloured dress, with her enormous stomach, making an absurd rotundity in front of her. The wedding guests, however, did not hurry themselves; they were all in the best of humours, happy at being looked at, and amused by the jocular remarks passed upon them.

"Look! there's the bride!" yelled one of the gamins, pointing to Madame Gaudron. "By bad luck! what a pip she's swallowed!"

The whole party burst out laughing. Bibi-the-Smoker, looking back, said that the youngster was precious sharp. The carder laughed the loudest, and was only too pleased at being noticed. It was nothing to be ashamed of, on the contrary, there was more than one lady who had given her a side glance as she passed, and who would have been only too happy to be in a similar state.

They next turned into the Rue de Clery. Then they took the Rue de Mail. At the Place des Victoires there was a halt, as the bride's left shoe lace had got loose. At last, after passing down the Rue Croix-des-Petits Champs, they reached the Louvre.

M. Madinier politely asked to be their guide. It was a big place, and they might lose themselves; besides he knew the best parts, because he had often come there with an artist, a very intelligent fellow, from whom a large dealer bought drawings to put on his cardboard boxes. And so they saw all the wonders of the Museum, and, tired out, proceeded to leave.

"All out! time to shut!" called out the attendants in a loud voice.

And the wedding party was nearly shut in. An attendant was obliged to place himself before it, and conduct it to a door. Then, in the courtyard of the Louvre, when it had recovered its umbrellas from the cloak-room, it found breath again. M. Madinier regained his assurance. He had made a mistake in not turning to the left, now he remembered that the jewellery was to the left. The whole party pretended to be very pleased at having seen what they had.

Four o'clock was striking. There were still two hours to be employed before dinner-time, so it was decided they should take a short walk, just to occupy the interval. The ladies, who were very tired, would have much pre-

ferred to sit down ; but, as no one offered to stand treat, they started off, following the line of quays. There they encountered another shower, and so sharp a one that, even with the umbrellas, the ladies' dresses began to get wet. Madame Lorilleux, her heart sinking each time a drop fell upon her black silk, proposed that they should shelter themselves under the Pont-Royal ; besides, if the others did not come with her, she threatened to go all by herself. And the procession defiled under one of the arches of the bridge. They were very comfortable there. It was, most certainly, a capital idea. The ladies spreading their handkerchiefs on the paving-stones, sat down with their knees apart, and pulled out the pieces of grass that grew between the stones with both hands, whilst they watched the dark flowing water as if they had been in the country. The men amused themselves by calling out aloud, so as to awaken the echoes of the arch. One after the other, Boche and Bibi-the Smoker insulted the vacant space, shouting out 'Pig !' with all their force and laughing heartily each time the echo sent the word back to them ; then, their throats getting husky, they picked up some flat stones, and tried to make them ricochet in the water.

The shower had ceased, but the whole party felt so comfortable that no one thought of moving away. The Seine was covered with a greasy matter, old corks and vegetable parings, heaps of filth, which an eddy detained a little in the restless waters, darkened by the shadow of the arch ; whilst on the top of the bridge could be heard the rumbling of the passing cabs and omnibuses, all the animation of Paris, of which only the roofs of the houses to the right and the left could be seen, as though from the bottom of some pit. Mademoiselle Remanjou sighed. If there had only been some foliage, it would have reminded her, she said, of a certain corner on the banks of the Marne, where she used to go about the year 1817 with a young man for whom she mourned still.

At last, M. Madinier gave the signal for departure,

They passed through the Tuileries gardens, in the midst of a little crowd of children, whose hoops and balls upset the correct order of the couples. Then, as the wedding party on arriving at the Place Vendome looked up at the column, M. Madinier gallantly offered to treat the ladies to a view of Paris from the top. His suggestion was considered very jolly. Yes, yes, they would go up; it would give them something to laugh about for a long time. Besides it was full of interest for those persons who had never been anywhere but on the ground among the cows.

"You can't think the Hobbler will venture inside there with her skittle leg!" murmured Madame Lorilleux.

"I'll go up with pleasure," said Madame Lerat, "but I won't have any men walking behind me."

And the whole party began the ascent. In the narrow spiral staircase, the twelve persons crawled up one after the other, stumbling against the worn steps, and clinging to the walls. Then when the obscurity became complete there were roars of laughter. The ladies screamed. The gentlemen tickled them. Afterwards Boche, who was in great form, declared that they were growing old in that chimney-pot. Would it never come to an end?—were they going right up to Heaven? And he tried to frighten the ladies by calling out that it was shaking. Coupeau, however, said nothing. He was behind Gervaise, with his arm round her waist, and felt that she was abandoning herself to him. When they suddenly emerged into the daylight, he was just in the act of kissing her on the neck.

"Well! you're a nice couple. You don't trouble yourselves, you two," said Madame Lorilleux, with a scandalised air.

Bibi-the-Smoker pretended to be furious. He muttered between his teeth,—

"You have been making such a noise! I wasn't even able to count the steps."

But M. Madinier was already up on the platform,

pointing out the different monuments. Neither Madame Fauconnier nor Mademoiselle Remanjou would stir from the staircase. The thought of the pavement below made their blood turn cold, and they contented themselves with taking peeps out of the little door. Madame Lerat who was bolder, went round the narrow terrace, keeping close to the bronze dome ; but, all the same, it gave one a shock to think that one only had to slip a foot. What a somersault, good God ! The men, rather pale, looked down on to the Place. One could almost think oneself up in the air, separated from everything. No, really, it gave you a chill to the marrow. M. Madinier, however, recommended raising the eyes, to look straight in front of one, far into the distance ; it prevented giddiness, and he proceeded to point out with his finger the Invalides, the Pantheon, Notre-Dame, the Tour Sainy-Jacques, the Buttes Montmartre. Then Madame Lorilleux thought of asking whether one could see, on the Boulevard de la Chapelle, the wine-shop where they were going to dine, the "Silver Windmill." So, for ten minutes they looked about, and even came to quarrelling ; each one placed the wine-shop in a different locality. Paris spread out around them its grey immensity, which in the more distant parts had a bluish tinge, and over its deep valleys floated a sea of roofs. All the right bank of the river was in shadow, beneath a vast ragged copper-coloured cloud ; and from the border of this cloud fringed with gold came a broad sunbeam, which illumined the thousands of window-panes on the left bank with a number of sparkling stars, causing that corner of the city to stand out against a bright blue sky cleared by the storm.

"It wasn't worth while coming up here to bite each other's noses off," said Boche angrily, as he turned to descend the staircase.

The wedding party went down, dumb and sulky, making no other sound than that of shoes clanking on the steps. When it reached the bottom, M. Madinier.

which had a vague musty odour. There were two looking-glasses covered with fly marks, one at either end of the room, and these lengthened the table indefinitely, with the coarse white dishes on it, in the scratches on which the greasy dish water had left a dark deposit, rapidly turning yellow. Each time a waiter came back from the kitchen the door banged, admitting a strong smell of burning fat.

"Don't all talk at once," said Boche, as everyone remained silent, with his nose bent on his plate.

And they were drinking the first glass of wine as their eyes followed two force-meat pies which the waiters were serving, when Mes-Bottes entered the room.

"Well, you are a scurvy lot, you people!" said he. "I've been wearing my legs out for three hours waiting on the high road, and a gendarme even came out and asked me for my papers. It isn't fair to play such dirty tricks on a friend. You might at least have sent me a cab by a commissaire. Ah! well, you know, joking apart, I think it's too bad. And, besides, it rained so hard that I've got my pockets full of water. It's a fact; you might fish in 'em for supper!"

The others wriggled with laughter. That animal Mes-Bottes was just touched; he had certainly already had his two quarts of wine, merely to prevent his being bothered by all that frog's syrup, with which the storm had deluged his giblets.

"Come, then, Count Leg-of-Mutton," said Coupeau, "just go and sit yourself beside Madame Gaudron. You see, we expected you."

Oh, that would not matter, he would soon catch the others up; and he asked for three helpings of soup, platefuls of vermicelli, in which he soaked enormous slices of bread. Then, when they had attacked the force-meat pies, he became the profound admiration of everyone at the table. How he guzzled! The amazed waiters helped each other to pass him bread, thinly-cut slices, which he swallowed at a mouthful. He ended by losing

his temper; he insisted on a loaf being placed beside him. The landlord, very anxious, came for a moment and looked in at the door. The party, which was expecting him, once more wriggled with laughter. It seemed to upset the purveyor. What a queer fellow he was, that Mes-Bottes! One day had he not eaten a dozen hard-boiled eggs, and drank a dozen glasses of wine while the clock was striking twelve? One doesn't meet many who can do that. And Mademoiselle Remanjou, deeply moved, watched Mes-Bottes chew, whilst M. Madinier, seeking for a word to express his almost respectful astonishment, declared such a capacity to be quite extraordinary.

There was a brief silence. A waiter had just placed on the table a ragout of rabbits in a vast dish as deep as a salad-bowl. Coupeau, who liked fun, started another jest.

"Look here, waiter, that rabbit's from the housetops. It still mews."

And in fact, a faint mew, perfectly imitated, seemed to issue from the dish. It was Coupeau who did it with his throat, without opening his lips—a talent which, at all parties, met with a success so great that he never ordered a dinner at an eating-house without having rabbit ragout. After that, he purred. The ladies pressed their napkins to their faces to stop their laughter. Madame l'auconnier asked for a head, she only liked that portion. Mademoiselle Remanjou adored the pieces of bacon. And as Boche said he preferred the little onions when they were nicely broiled, Madame Lerat screwed up her lips, and murmured,—

"I can't understand that."

She was as dry as a vine-prop, and led the life of a workwoman immured in her occupations, never having seen the nose of a man in her home since she became a widow, but showing a continual tendency to doubtful things, a mania for words of double meaning, and dubious allusions so profound, that she alone could understand

them. As Boche leant towards her, and, in a whisper, asked for an explanation, she resumed—

“Of course, little onions. That’s quite enough, I think.”

There had been some stewed veal and French beans ; and now they brought in the roast, two skinny chickens lying on a bed of faded cresses, and cooked in the oven. Outside, the sun was setting behind the high branches of the acacias. In the room, the greenish reflection was thickening with the fumes that rose from the table, stained all over with wine and gravy, and covered with the *debris* of the china, knives, etc. ; and along the wall, dirty plates and empty bottles looked like so much rubbish swept and shaken from the cloth. It was very warm. The men took off their coats and continued eating in their shirt-sleeves.

“Madame Boche, please don’t let them stuff themselves so much,” said Gervaise, who spoke but little, and who was watching Claude and Etienne from a distance.

She got up from her seat, and went and talked for a minute behind the little ones’ chairs. Children had no power to reason ; they would eat all day long without refusing a single thing ; and then she herself helped them to some chicken, a little of the breast. But mother Coupeau said they might, just for once, risk an attack of indigestion.

It was not long before they reached the dessert. The waiters were clearing the table with a great rattling of crockery ; and Madame Lorilleux, who until then had been most ladylike, allowed to escape from her the expression, “cursed fool !” because one of the waiters had spilt something down her neck as he removed a dish. Her silk dress was badly stained. M. Madinier was obliged to look at her back, but he declared there was nothing the matter. Now, in the middle of the table, rose a salad-bowl full of frosted eggs, flanked by two plates of cheese and two plates of fruit. The frosted eggs, with the whites over cooked and floating on the

yellow cream, made all the party start; they had not been anticipated, so that the guests were delighted. Mes-Bottes was still eating. He had asked for another loaf. He finished two portions of cheese; and, as there was some cream left, he had the salad-bowl passed to him, into which he sliced some large pieces of bread as though for a soup.

"The gentleman is really remarkable," said M. Madinier, again speaking in admiration.

Then the men rose up to get their pipes. They stood for a moment behind Mes-Bottes, patting him on the shoulders, and asking him if he felt better. Bibi-the-Smoker lifted him up in his chair; but the animal had doubled in weight. Coupeau, for a joke, stated that his comrade was only just beginning his work, and that he would go on eating like that all through the night. The waiters, terrified, beat a hasty retreat. Boche, who had just before gone downstairs, came back relating the queer face the landlord was making over it: he was looking as pale as death behind the counter. His wife, in a state of consternation, had sent out to see if the bakers were still open; even the house cat looked as though ruin was at hand. Really, it was too comic; it was worth the money of the dinner, no picnic would be successful without that swallow-all, Mes-Bottes. And the men, smoking their pipes, watched him with jealous looks; for, after all, to be able to eat so much, he must be a well-built fellow.

"I wouldn't care to be obliged to feed you," said Madame Gaudron. "Ah, no; you may be sure."

It was now pitch dark outside, three gas jets were flaring in the room, diffusing dim rays in the midst of the tobacco-smoke. The waiters, after serving the coffee and the brandy, had removed the last pile of dirty plates. Down below, beneath the three acacias, dancing had commenced, a cornet-a-piston and two fiddles playing very loud, and mingling in the warm night air with the rather hoarse laughter of women.

"We must have a 'fire-ship!'" cried Mes-bottes;

"two quarts of 'stomach-burner,' lots of lemon, and a little sugar."

But Coupeau, seeing the anxious look on Gervaise's face in front of him, got up from the table, declaring that there should be no more drink. They had emptied twenty-five quarts, a quart and a half to each person, counting the children as grown-up people; that was even too much. They had had a bite together in good friendship, and without ceremony, because they esteemed one another, and wished to celebrate this event amongst themselves. All had gone off very pleasantly. They were gay, and they must not go and get drunk if they wished to show respect to the ladies. In a word, and finally, they had met together to drink the health of the newly-married pair, and not to become regularly screwed. This little speech, spoken in a determined tone of voice by the zinc-worker, who placed his hand on his bosom at the end of every phrase, was warmly approved by Lorilleux and M. Madinier. But the others—Boche, Gaudron, Bibi-the-Smoker, and especially Mes-Bottes, all four pretty tight already—only jeered, their tongues thick, and feeling a confounded thirst, which they must moisten at any risk.

"Those who're thirsty are thirsty, and those who aren't thirsty aren't thirsty," remarked Mes-Bottes. "Therefore we'll order the 'fire-ship.' No one need be offended. The aristocrats can drink their sugar-and-water."

And as the zinc-worker commenced to preach anew, the other, who had risen on his legs, gave him a slap, exclaiming,—

"Come, let's have no more of that, my boy! Waiter, two quarts of the old stuff!"

Then Coupeau said it was all right, only that they would settle for the dinner at once. It would prevent any disputes. The well-behaved people did not need to pay for the drunkards; and it just happened that Mes-Bottes, after searching in his pockets for a long time, could only produce three francs and seven sous. Well,

why had they made him wait all that time on the Route de Saint-Denis? He could not let himself be drowned, and so he had broken into his five-franc piece. The others were to blame, that was all. He ended by giving the three francs, keeping the seven sous for his to-morrow's tobacco. Coupeau, who was furious, would have knocked him over, had not Gervaise, greatly frightened, pulled him by his coat, and begged him to keep cool. He decided to borrow the two francs from Lorilleux, who, after refusing them, lent them on the sly, for his wife would never have consented to his giving them.

M. Madinier went round with a plate. The spinster and ladies who were alone—Madame Lerat, Madame Fauconnier, Mademoiselle Remanjou—discreetly placed their five-franc pieces in it the first. Then the gentleman went to the other end of the room to make up the accounts. They were fifteen; it amounted, therefore, to seventy-five francs. When the seventy-five francs were in the plate, each man added five sous for the waiters. It took a quarter of an hour of labourious calculations before everything was arranged to the satisfaction of the whole company.

But when M. Madinier, who wished to deal direct with the landlord, had asked him to come in, the whole party were astonished on hearing him say with a smile that there was still something due to him. There were some extras; and, as the word "extras" was greeted with angry exclamations, he entered into details:—Twenty five quarts of wine, instead of twenty, the number agreed upon beforehand; the frosted eggs, which he had added, observing that the dessert was rather meagre; finally, a quarter of a bottle of rum, served with the coffee, in case anyone preferred rum. Then a formidable quarrel ensued. Coupeau, on being appealed to, protested against everything; he had never mentioned twenty quarts; as for the frosted eggs, they were with the dessert, and so much the worse for the landlord if he chose to add them of his own accord. There remained the rum,

a mere nothing, just a mode of increasing the bill by putting on the table spirits that no one would have thought of.

"It was on the tray with the coffee," he cried; "therefore it goes with the coffee. Shut up about it. Take your money, and never again will we set foot in your barrache!"

"It's six francs more," repeated the landlord. "Pay me six francs; and even then I haven't counted the four loaves that gentleman ate!"

The whole party, pressing about him, surrounded him with furious gestures and a yelping of voices which were choking with rage. The women especially threw aside all reserve, and refused to add a centime. Ah, well, it was a pretty wedding party. Mademoiselle Remanjou would never again mix herself up in such affairs. Madame Fauconnier had dined very badly indeed; at home, for a couple of francs, she could have had a dinner to lick one's fingers at. Madame Gaudron complained bitterly of having been placed at the bad end of the table, next to Mes-Bottes, who had not shown her the least attention. In short, those sort of parties always finished up badly. When one wanted to have friends at one's wedding, they should really invite them, by Jove! And Gervaise, who had taken refuge behind mother Coupeau, in front of one of the windows, said nothing, but was quite ashamed, feeling that all those recriminations were directed at her.

M. Madinier ended by going down with the landlord. One could hear them arguing below. Then, when half an hour had gone by, the cardboard-box manufacturer returned; he had settled the matter by paying three francs. But the party continued annoyed and exasperated, constantly returning to the question of the extras.

The evening's enjoyment was altogether broken. Everyone became more and more ill-tempered. M. Madinier suggested some singing, but Bibi-the-Smoker, who had a fine voice, had already disappeared. Then

there was a breaking up of the party: Mes-Bottes and the Gaudrons went down; Boche went off alone. The night was peaceful, and without a breeze, the heat making one feel faint. In the dining-room, M. Madinier and Lorilleux were engaged in serious conversation; whilst the ladies, no longer knowing how to give vent to their ill-humour, were examining their dresses, in order to discover if they had got at all stained.

Madame Lerat's fringe looked as though it had been dipped in the coffee. Madame Fauconnier's chintz dress was full of gravy. Mother Coupeau's green shawl, which had fallen off a chair, was discovered in a corner, rolled up and trodden upon. But it was Madame Lorilleux especially who became more wrathful still. She had a stain on the back of her dress; it was useless for the others to declare that she had not—she felt it. And, by twisting herself about in front of a looking-glass, she ended by catching sight of it.

"What was I saying?" cried she. "It's gravy from the fowl. The waiter shall pay for the dress. I will bring an action against him. Ah! this day is indeed complete. I should have done better to have stayed in bed. I'm off, anyhow. I've had enough of their miserable wedding."

It was scarcely eleven o'clock. On the Boulevard de la Chapelle, and in the entire neighbourhood of the Goutte-d'Or, the fortnight's pay, which fell due on that Saturday, produced an enormous amount of drinking. Madame Lorilleux was waiting beneath a gas-lamp about twenty paces from the "Silver Windmill." She took her husband's arm, and walked on in front without looking round, with such rapid steps that Gervaise and Coupeau got quite out of breath in keeping up with them. Now and again they stepped off the pavement to leave room for some drunkard who had fallen there. Lorilleux looked back, endeavouring to make things pleasant.

"We will see you to your own door," said he.

But Madame Lorilleux, raising her voice, said it was a

funny thing to spend one's wedding-night in such a filthy hole as the Hotel Boncœur. Ought they not to have put their marriage off, and have saved a few coppers to buy some furniture, so as to have had a home of their own on the first night? Ah! they would be comfortable, right up under the roof, packed into a little closet, at ten francs a month, when there was not even free air.

"I've given notice to quit; we're not going to use the room up at the top of the house," timidly interposed Coupeau. "We keep Gervaise's room, which is larger."

Madame Lorilleux forgot herself as she turned abruptly round upon them.

"That is really too much!" cried she. "You're going to sleep in the Hobbler's room!"

Gervaise became very pale. This nickname, which she received right in the face for the first time, struck her like a blow. Yet she fully understood, too, her sister-in-law's exclamation. Coupeau did not understand this, but merely felt wounded at the nickname.

"You do wrong to christen others," replied he angrily. "You don't know, perhaps, that in the neighbourhood they call you Cow's-Tail, because of your hair. There, now; that doesn't please you does it? Why should we not keep the room on the first floor? To-night the children won't sleep there, and we shall do very well indeed."

Madame Lorilleux added nothing further, but retired into her dignity, horribly vexed at being called Cow's-Tail.

Coupeau, to console Gervaise, gently squeezed her arm; and he even succeeded in making her smile, by telling her in a whisper that they were beginning their married life with exactly seven sous—three big ones and a little one, which he shook together in his pocket.

When they reached the Hotel Boncœur, the two couples wished each other good night, with an air of annoyance; and as Coupeau pushed the two women on each other's necks, calling them a couple of "sillies," a drunken fellow, who seemed to want to go to the right,

suddenly reeled to the left, and came rolling between them.

"Hallo! it's old Bazouge!" said Lorilleux. "He's had his full account to-day."

Gervaise, frightened, squeezed up against the door of the hotel. Old Bazouge, an undertaker's mute of some fifty years of age, had his black trousers all stained with mud, his black cape hooked on to his shoulder, and his black leather hat knocked in by some fall he had had.

"Don't be afraid; he isn't mischievous!" continued Lorilleux. "He's a neighbour of ours—the third room in the passage before us. He would find himself in a nice mess if his governors were to see him like this."

Old Bazouge, however, felt annoyed at the young woman's evident terror.

"Well, what!" hiccoughed he; "people like me don't eat anyone. I'm as good as another; come now, my little woman. No doubt I've drunk a glassful! When work's abundant, one must grease the wheels. It's not you, nor this lot, who would have carried down the dead chap of forty-seven stone whom I and my partner brought from the fourth floor to the pavement, and without cracking him up, too. I like jolly folks."

But Gervaise retreated further into the angle of the doorway, seized with a great desire to cry, which spoilt her day of sober-minded joy. She no longer thought of kissing her sister-in-law; she implored Coupeau to get rid of the drunkard. Then Bazouge, as he reeled about, made a gesture full of philosophical disdain.

"That won't prevent your passing through our hands my little woman. You'll perhaps be glad to do so, one of these days. Yes, I know some women who'd say 'thank you,' if we carried them off."

And as the two Lorilleux were leading him away, he turned round, and stuttered out a last sentence, between two hiccoughs.

"When one cock dies—listen to this—when one is 'booking' it, it's for a long time."

CHAPTER IV.

THERE were four years of hard work after this. In the neighbourhood, Gervaise and Coupeau were said to be agreeable, living retired, without quarrels, and taking a walk regularly every Sunday in the direction of Saint-Ouen. The wife worked twelve hours a day at Madame Fauconnier's, and still found means to keep their lodging as clean and bright as a sou, and to prepare the meals for her family morning and evening. The husband never got drunk, brought his wages home regularly, and smoked a pipe at his window in the evening, to take the air before going to bed. They were frequently quoted for their nice, pleasant ways; and, as between them they earned close upon nine francs a day, it was reckoned that they were able to put by a good bit of money.

FOR two months past they had been busy searching for apartments. They wanted above everything to hire these in the large house of the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. But there was not a single room to let there, so that they had to relinquish their old dream. To tell the truth, Gervaise was rather glad at heart; the neighbourhood of the Lorilleux, almost door to door, frightened her very much. Then, they looked about elsewhere. Coupeau, very properly, did not wish to be far from Madame Fauconnier's, so that Gervaise could easily run home at any hour of the day. And at length they met with exactly what suited them, a large room with a small room and a kitchen, in the Rue Neuve de la Goutte d'Or,

almost facing the laundress's. It was a small house with only a single storey, reached by a very steep staircase, at the top of which there were only two lodgings, one to the right and the other to the left; the ground-floor was occupied by a cab hirer, whose property was disposed in some stables and coach-houses, in a vast courtyard adjoining the street. The young woman, quite charmed, almost fancied herself back again in the country; no neighbours, no gossip to fear, a little quiet corner which reminded her of an alley at Plassans, behind the ram-parts; and, to complete her good luck, by stretching her neck, she could see her window from her ironing table without leaving her work.

They took possession of their new abode at the April term. Gervaise was then eight months pregnant. But she showed great courage, saying with a laugh that the child helped her when she worked; she felt its little hands pushing her and giving her strength. Ah, well! she did nothing but laugh at Coupeau whenever he wanted her to lie down and rest! She would take to her bed when the great pains came on. That would be quite soon enough; for now, when there was to be one more mouth to feed, they must make a fresh attempt. And it was she who cleaned out the place before helping her husband to put the furniture in its place. She had quite a religious regard for the movables, dusting them with maternal care, her heart breaking at the sight of the least scratch. She stood still quite taken aback, as though she had struck herself, whenever she knocked against them whilst sweeping. The chest of drawers was, above all, dear to her; she thought it beautiful, solid, and serious looking. A dream, of which she dared not speak, was to have a clock to stand in the centre of the marble slab, where it would produce a magnificent effect. Had it not been for the baby which was coming, she would perhaps have risked buying her clock. However she put it off till later with a sigh.

The couple were thoroughly enchanted with their new

dwelling. Etienne's bed occupied the small closet, where there was still room to put another child's crib. The kitchen was exceedingly small and exceedingly dark ; but, by leaving the door wide open, one could just see pretty plainly ; besides, Gervaise had not to cook meals for thirty people,—all she wanted was room to make her soup. As for the large room, it was their pride. Of a morning they would draw the curtains of the alcove, white calico curtains ; and the apartment was thus transformed into a dining-room, with the table in the centre, and the wardrobe and the chest of drawers facing each other. As the grate burned as much as fifteen sous' worth of coal a day, they shut it up ; and a little cast-iron stove, placed on the marble stone, kept them warm for seven sous during the coldest weather. Then Coupeau decorated the walls as best he could, projecting several embellishments ; a tall engraving, representing a marshal of France caracoling with his baton in his hand between a cannon and a heap of cannon balls, occupied the place of a mirror ; over the chest of drawers some family photographs were hung in two rows ; to the right and left of a little old gilded china holy water font, in which matches were kept : on the top of the wardrobe, close to the wooden clock, to the ticking of which they seemed to be listening, a bust of Pascal alongside of the bust of Beranger, the one looking grave, the other smiling. It was really a pretty room.

"Guess how much we pay here ?" Gervaise would ask of every visitor.

And, whenever they guessed her rent too high, she, triumphed and delighted at being so well placed for such a little money, cried,—

"One hundred and fifty francs, not a sou more. Isn't it as if you had it given you ?"

The Rue Neuve de la Goutte-d'Or was itself a good part of the cause of their contentment, Gervaise lived there, going incessantly backwards and forwards between her home and Madame Fauconnier's. Coupeau would

now go down in the evenings and smoke his pipe on the doorstep.

It was on the last day of April that the young woman was confined. The pains came on in the afternoon, towards four o'clock, as she was ironing a pair of curtains at Madame Fauconnier's. She would not go home immediately, but remained there twisting about on a chair, and smoothing away with her iron every time the pain allowed her to do so; the curtains were wanted quickly, and she was determined to finish them. Besides, after all it was only a colic; it would be ridiculous to be frightened by a stomach-ache. But she was talking of starting on some men's shirts, she became quite pale. She was obliged to leave the workshop, and cross the street, doubled in two, holding on to the walls. One workwoman offered to accompany her; she declined, but begged her rather to go for the midwife, close by, in the Rue de la Charbonniere. The house was not on fire; it was all right. She would be like that, no doubt, all night. It was not going to prevent her getting Coupeau's dinner ready. Then she might perhaps lie down on the bed a little, without even undressing herself. On the staircase she was seized with such an extreme pain, that she was obliged to sit down on one of the stairs; and she pressed her fists against her mouth to prevent herself from crying out, for she would have been ashamed to have been found there by any of the men, had they come along. The pain passed away; she was able to open her door, feeling relieved, and thinking she had decidedly been mistaken. That evening she was going to make a mutton-stew with some neck chops. All went well whilst she peeled the potatoes. The chops were cooking in a saucepan, when the sweats and the pains returned. She stirred her sauce as she moved about in front of the stove, almost blinded with her tears. If she was going to be confined, that was no reason why Coupeau should have no dinner. At length the stew began to simmer on a fire covered with cinders. She returned to the room,

and thought she would have time to lay the cloth at one end of the table. But she was obliged to put down the bottle of wine very quickly; she no longer had strength to reach the bed; she fell, and was confined on the floor, on a mat. When the midwife arrived, a quarter of an hour later, it was there that she had her baby.

The zinc-worker still worked at the hospital. Gervaise would not allow him to be disturbed. When he came home at seven o'clock, he found her in bed, well covered up, but very pale, on the pillow. The child was crying, swathed in a shawl at its mother's feet.

"Ah, my poor wife!" said Coupeau, kissing Gervaise. "And I was making fun only an hour ago, whilst you were crying out in your pain! Come, now, you don't bother much about it—just time to sneeze, and the trouble is past."

She gave a faint smile, then she murmured,—

"It's a girl."

"Exactly, resumed the zinc-worker, jesting, so as to encourage her. "I had ordered a girl. Well, now, I'm supplied. You do everything I wish." And, taking the child up, he continued, "Let's have a look at you, little monkey. You've got a very black little mouth. It'll whiten, never fear. It must be good; never run about the streets, but grow up sensible like its papa and mamma."

Gervaise looked at her daughter very seriously, with wide open eyes, slowly overshadowed with sadness. She shook her head; she would have preferred a boy, because boys always get on somehow or other, and do not run so many risks in Paris. The midwife had to take the baby out of Coupeau's hands. She also forbade Gervaise to speak; it was quite bad enough that so much noise was made round about her. Then the zinc-worker said that he must tell the news to mother Coupeau and the Lorilleux, but he was starving, and must first have his dinner. It was a great vexation to the sick woman to see him wait on himself, run to the kitchen for the stew, eat it out of a soup-plate, and not be able to

find the bread. In spite of being told not to do so, she vexed herself, and fidgeted about in the blankets. Indeed it was stupid of her not to manage to set the table; the colic had laid her low like a blow from a bludgeon. Her poor old man would not like to see her coddling herself up there whilst he was dining so badly. At least, were the potatoes cooked enough? She did not remember whether she had put salt to them.

"Keep quiet, now!" cried the midwife.

"Ah! you can't keep her from worrying herself," said Coupeau, with his mouth full. "If you were not there, I'd bet she'd get up to cut my bread. Keep on your back, you big turkey! You mustn't move about, otherwise it'll be a fortnight before you'll be able to stand on your legs. Your stew's very good. Madame will eat some with me. Won't you, madame?"

The midwife declined; but she was willing to drink a glass of wine, because it had quite put her out, said she, to find the poor woman on the mat. Coupeau at length went off to tell the news to his own people. Half an hour later he returned with all of them, mother Coupeau, the Lorilleux, and Madame Lerat, whom he had met at the latter's. The Lorilleux, when they had seen the couple's prosperity, had become very amiable, being most flattering about Gervaise, accompanying their remarks, however, by little restrictive gestures, nods of the head, and peculiar looks, as though to postpone their real judgment. In short, they knew what they knew; only they did not wish to go against the opinion of the whole neighbourhood.

"I've brought you the whole lot!" cried Coupeau. "It can't be helped; they wanted to see you. Don't open your mouth; it's forbidden. They'll stop there and look at you, without any nonsense, you know. As for me, I'm going to make them some coffee, and jolly stuff, too!"

He disappeared into the kitchen. Mother Coupeau, after kissing Gervaise, wondered at the child's size. The

two other women also saluted the young mother on her cheeks. And all three standing before the bed, commented with divers exclamations on the details of the confinement—such an odd confinement, just like having a tooth drawn, nothing more. Madame Lerat examined the little one all over, declared that she was well formed, and even added, with an air of mystery, that she would become a remarkable woman; and as she thought her head was too pointed, she began to press it gently, in spite of its cries, so as to make it rounder.

Coupeau did not reappear for a while. He could be heard in the kitchen struggling with the grate and the coffee-pot. Gervaise was annoying herself fearfully; it was not the proper thing for the man to make coffee; and she called out to him what to do, without listening to the midwife's energetic "hush!"

"Here you are!" said Coupeau, entering with the coffee-pot in his hand. "Didn't I just have a trouble with it. It must have determined to worry me. Now, we'll drink out of glasses, won't we? because, you see, the cups are still at the shop."

They seated themselves round the table, and the zinc-worker would pour out the coffee himself. It smelt very strong; it was none of that stuff for the birds to sip. When the midwife had drunk hers, she went off; everything was going on nicely, she was not required. If Gervaise did not pass a good night they were to send for her next day. They pushed the table close up to the bed. Until ten o'clock, Gervaise, overcome little by little with an immense fatigue, remained smiling and stupid, her head turned on the pillow; she saw, she heard, but she no longer found strength to make a gesture, nor to utter a word; she seemed to be dead, of a very gentle death, from the depth of which she was pleased enough to see the others alive. Now and again the little one uttered a faint cry, in the midst of the loud voices, of the endless opinions on the murder committed the day before in the Rue du Bon-Puits, at the other end of La Chapelle.

Then, as the visitors were thinking of leaving, they spoke of the christening. The Lorilleux had promised to be godfather and godmother; in their hearts, they did not like it. However, if they had not been asked to stand they would have felt it rather a singular thing. Coupeau did not see any need for christening the little one; it certainly would not procure her an income of ten thousand francs, and more than that, she might catch a cold from it. The less one had to do with priests the better. But mother Coupeau called him a heathen. The Lorilleux, without going to take mass in church, piqued themselves on their religious sentiments.

"It shall be on Sunday first, if you like," said the chain-maker.

And Gervaise having consented by a gesture of her head, everyone kissed her, and told her to take great care of herself. They also said adieu to the baby. Each one went and leant over the little trembling body with smiles and loving words, as if she had been able to understand. They called her Nana, the pet name for Anna, the name her godmother bore.

"Good night, Nana. Be a good girl Nana."

When they had at length gone off, Coupeau drew his chair up to the bed and finished his pipe, holding Gervaise's hand in his own. He smoked slowly, and uttering sentences between the puffs, deeply affected.

"Well, my girl, they've made your head ache, haven't they? You see, I couldn't prevent their coming. After all, it proves their friendship. But we're better alone, aren't we? I was anxious to be alone, like this with you. The evening has seemed to be dreary to me. Poor little chicken! she's had a good deal of squeezing. Those shrimps, when they come into the world, have no idea of the pain they cause. Of course, they ought to open one's heart. Where is the poor little chick, that I may kiss it?"

He gently slid one of his big hands under her back, and drawing her towards him, he kissed her on the bosom

with a coarse man's tenderness for the still suffering mortal. He asked her if he hurt her ; he would have wished to have cured her by simply breathing on her. And Gervaise was very happy. She assured him that she was not suffering at all. She was only thinking of getting up as soon as possible, for now it would never do for her to remain with crossed hands. But he tried to reassure her. Wasn't he going to earn all that was necessary for the little one ?

Madame Boche, who had been told of the confinement, had hastened to go and pass the day with Gervaise. But the invalid, after ten hours of sound sleep, bewailed her position, saying that she already felt all cramped through having lain so long in bed. She would become quite ill if they did not let her get up. In the evening, when Coupeau returned home, she told him all her annoyances ; no doubt she had confidence in Madame Boche, only it put her beside herself to see a stranger installed in her room, opening the drawers, and touching her things.

On the morrow the doorkeeper, on returning from some errand, found her up, dressed, sweeping, and busy getting ready her husband's dinner ; and it was impossible to persuade her to go to bed again. They were trying to make fun of her, perhaps ! It was all very well for ladies to pretend to be fairly knocked up. When one was not rich, one had no time for that. Three days after her confinement, she was ironing petticoats at Madame Fauconnier's, banging her irons, bathed in perspiration from the great heat of the stove.

On the Saturday evening, Madame Lorilleux brought her presents for her godchild—a cap that cost thirty-five sous, and a christening dress, plated and trimmed with some poor lace, which she had got for six francs, because it was a little soiled. The next day Lorilleux, as godfather, gave the mother six pounds of sugar. They did things in a very proper way. Even in the evening, at the feast which the Coupeaus gave, they did not arrive empty handed. The husband brought a sealed bottle of wine

under each arm, whilst the wife carried a big custard, bought at a fashionable pastry-cook's in the Chaussee Clignancourt. Only, the Lorilleux went and related their great generosity all over the neighbourhood; they had spent nearly twenty francs. Gervaise, on hearing of their gossiping, was very angry, and no longer thought anything of their grand liberality.

It was at this christening dinner that the Coupeaus ended by coming intimately acquainted with their neighbours on the opposite side of the landing. The other rooms in the little house were occupied by two persons, mother and son, the Goujets as they were called. Until then, the two families had only nodded to each other on the stairs, and in the street, nothing more; the Coupeaus thought their neighbours seemed rather bearish. Then the mother having carried up a pail of water to Gervaise on the morning of her confinement, the latter had thought it was good manners to invite them to the feast, more especially as she considered them very respectable people. And naturally, they there became quite intimate.

The Goujets came from the Department du Nord. The mother mended lace; the son, a blacksmith, worked at an iron bolt factory. They had lived in the same rooms for five years. Behind the quiet peacefulness of their life was concealed a long standing sorrow. Goujet, the father, one day when furiously drunk at Lille, had beaten a comrade to death with an iron bar, and had afterwards strangled himself in prison with his handkerchief. The widow and the child, having come to Paris after their misfortune, always felt this tragedy hanging over their heads, and atoned for it by a strict honesty, and an unvarying gentleness and courage. Indeed, there was a kind of pride mingled with their case, for they ended by finding themselves better than others. Madame Goujet, always dressed in black, with her forehead framed in a nun's cap, had the white and calm face of a matron, as though the paleness of the lace, and the

minute work performed by her fingers, imparted a reflection of serenity to her. Goujet was a superb-looking colossus of twenty-three, with a rosy face, blue eyes, and of herculean strength. His comrades at the factory nicknamed him Golden Jaws, on account of his handsome yellow beard.

Gervaise felt suddenly a great friendship for these people. When she entered their home the first time, she was amazed at the neatness of the rooms. Madame Goujet made her enter her son's room, just to see it. It was pretty and white like the room of a girl; an iron bedstead with muslin curtains, a table, a washstand, and a narrow bookcase hanging against the wall. Then there were pictures all over the place, figures cut out, coloured engravings nailed up with four tacks, and portraits of all kinds of persons, selected from the illustrated papers. Madame Goujet said, with a smile that her son was a big child. Gervaise spent an hour with her neighbour, who had returned to her tambour frame, in front of the window. She felt interested in the hundreds of pins fixing the lace down, happy at being there, breathing the pleasant odour of cleanliness which pervaded the house, in which that delicate work suggested a thoughtful silence.

The Goujets grew on acquaintance. They worked long hours, and placed more than a quarter of their fortnight's earnings in the savings-bank. In the neighbourhood everyone nodded to them, everyone talked of their economy. Goujet never had a hole in his clothes, always went out in a clean short blue blouse, without a spot. He was very polite, and even a trifle timid, in spite of his broad shoulders.

In the early days of their acquaintance, Gervaise embarrassed him very much. Then, in a few weeks, he became accustomed to her. He watched for her that he might carry up her parcels, treated her as he would a sister, with an abrupt familiarity, and cut out pictures for her. One morning, however, having opened her door

without knocking, he beheld her half undressed, washing her neck; and, for a week, he did not dare to look her in the face, so much so that at last he made her blush herself.

Young Cassis, with his Parisian cheek, thought Golden Jaws a bit of a muff. It was well not to get drunk, and not to shove your nose into the face of every girl in the street; but, all the same, a man should be a man, otherwise he might as well wear petticoats at once. He would chaff him before Gervaise, accusing him of making eyes at all the women of the neighbourhood; and that colossal drum-major of a Goujet would energetically deny it. This did not prevent the two workmen from being good friends. They called each other in the morning, started off together, and sometimes one of them stood a glass of beer on their way home. Ever since the christening feast they spoke to one another quite familiarly. Their friendship had reached this point, when Golden Jaws rendered Young Cassis a great service—one of those special services with a man remembers all his life. It was on the 2nd of December, 1852. The zinc-worker, just for a spree, had had the brilliant idea to go and see the riots. He did not care a sou for the Republic, or Bonaparte, or the rest of them; only he liked the smell of powder, the firing amused him, and he was on the point of being caught behind a barricade, if the blacksmith had not happened to be there just in time to protect him with his big body, and helped him to get away. Goujet, as they ascended the Rue du Faubourg-Poissonniere, walked quickly, with a grave look on his face. That evening the Coupeaus invited the Goujets to dinner. During dessert, Young Cassis and Golden Jaws kissed each other twice on the cheek. Now their friendship was for life and death.

During three years the career of the two families went on, on either side of the landing, without an event. Gervaise had contrived to bring up the little one without the loss of more than two days' work a week. She had

become a first-rate clear starcher, earning as much as three francs a day. Therefore she had decided to send Etienne, who was now nearly eight years old, to a little school in the Rue de Chartres, where she had paid five francs. The couple, notwithstanding the expense of bringing up the two children, put twenty or thirty francs every month into the savings-bank. When their savings amounted to the sum of six hundred francs, the young woman, beset with a dream of ambition, could hardly sleep. She wanted to set up in business for herself, to take a small shop, and to employ workwomen in her turn. She had calculated everything. At the end of twenty years, if all went well, they would have a little fortune, on which they would go and live somewhere in the country. However, she did not dare to risk the money. She said she was looking for a shop, so as to give herself time for reflection. The money was in no danger at the savings-bank; on the contrary, it made a little interest. In three years she had satisfied only one of her desires—she had bought herself an ornamental clock; and that clock, a clock in a violet ebony case, with twisted columns, and a gilded brass pendulum, was to be paid for in a year, by instalments of twenty sous every Monday. She was quite annoyed whenever Coupeau talked of winding it up. She alone took off the glass shade, and dusted the columns religiously, as if the marble top of her chest of drawers had been transformed into a chapel. Under the glass shade, behind the clock, she hid the savings-bank book; and often, when she was dreaming of her shop, she would forget herself, in front of the dial plate, her eyes fixed on the turning hands, as though she were awaiting some solemn and particular minute in which to decide.

The very day on which Nana was three years old, Coupeau, on returning home in the evening, found Gervaise quite upset. She refused to say anything; there was nothing at all the matter with her, she said. But, as she laid the table quite out of order, standing still with

the plates in her hands, while she became absorbed in deep reflection, her husband insisted upon knowing what was wrong.

"Well, it is this," she ended by confessing; "the little draper's shop in the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or is to let. I saw it only an hour ago, when going to buy some cotton. It put me into quite a queer state."

It was a very respectable shop, and in that big house where they dreamed of living in former days. There was the shop, a back shop, and two other rooms to the right and left; in short, just what they required. The rooms were rather small, but well placed. Only she considered they wanted too much; the landlord talked of five hundred francs.

"So you've been over the place, and asked the price?" said Coupeau.

"Oh! you know, out of mere curiosity," replied she, affecting an air of indifference. "One looks about, and goes in wherever there are bills up—that doesn't bind one to anything. But that shop is too dear, certainly it is; and, moreover, it would perhaps be foolish of me to set up in business."

However, after dinner, she again referred to the draper's shop. She sketched the house on the margin of a newspaper. And, little by little, she talked about it, measuring the corners, arranging the rooms, as though she were going to move all her furniture into them the next day. Then Coupeau advised her to take it, seeing how much she wanted to do so. She would certainly never find anything really respectable under five hundred francs; besides, they might perhaps get this at a less price. The only objection to it was living in the same house as the Lorilleux, whom she could not bear. But, she protested, she disliked nobody; in the warmth of her desire she even stood up for the Lorilleux; they were not spiteful at heart—they would get on very well together. And, when they had gone to bed, Coupeau fell asleep whilst she was still continuing to plan the arrangement of the

rooms, without, however, having decided with a clear determination, to take the place.

That evening, Gervaise frankly owned, smiling, that she would have fallen ill if she had been prevented from having the shop. Nevertheless, before saying "it's done!" she wished to take Coupeau to see the place, and try and obtain a reduction in the rent.

"Very well, then, to-morrow, if you like," said her husband. "You can come and find me towards six o'clock at the house where I'm working, in the Rue de la Nation, and we'll call at the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or on our return."

Coupeau was then finishing the roofing of a new three-storied house. It so happened that on that day he was to fix the last sheets of zinc. As the roof was nearly flat, he had set up his bench on it, a wide shutter supported on two trestles. A beautiful May sun was setting, gilding the chimney-pots. And, right up at the top, against the clear sky, the workman was quietly cutting up the zinc with a big pair of shears, leaning over the bench, like a tailor in his shop cutting out a pair of trousers. Close to the wall of the next house, his boy, a lad of seventeen, thin and fair, was keeping the fire of the chafing dish blazing by the aid of an enormous pair of bellows, each puff of which raised a cloud of sparks.

"Hi! Zidore, put in the irons!" cried Coupeau.

The boy thrust the soldering irons into the midst of the brazier, whose contents looked a pale rose colour in the daylight. Then he set again to blowing. Coupeau held the last sheet of zinc. It had to be placed at the edge of the roof, close to the gutter-pipe; there was an abrupt slant there, and the gaping hollow of the street opened beneath. The zinc-worker, just as in his own home, wearing list-shoes, advanced, dragging his feet, and whistling the air, "O he! the little lambs." Arrived in front of the hole, he let himself glide, and then, supporting himself with one knee against the masonry of a chimney-stack remained halfway from the edge of the roof.

One of his legs hung over. When he leant back to call that young viper, Zidore, he held on to a corner of the masonry, on account of the street yawning beneath him.

"You idle beggar! Give me the irons! It's no use looking up in the air, you skinny beggar! the larks won't fall into your mouth, ready roasted!"

But Zidore did not hurry himself. He was interested in the neighbouring roofs, and in a cloud of smoke which rose from the other side of Paris, on the Grenelle side; it was very likely a fire. However, he came, and lying flat on his stomach, his head over the hole, he passed the irons to Coupeau. Then the latter commenced to solder the sheet. He squatted, he stretched, always managing to balance himself, sometimes seated on one hip, at others standing on the tip of one foot, sometimes only holding on by a finger. He had an enormous amount of assurance, the presumption of thunder, familiar with danger, and braving it. It knew him. It was the street that was afraid of *him*. As he did not take his pipe from his mouth, he turned round every now and then to spit on the pavement.

"Hallo! Madame Roche!" cried he, suddenly.
"Hi! Madame Roche!"

He had just caught sight of the doorkeeper crossing the road. She raised her head and recognized him. A conversation followed between them. She hid her hands under her apron, her nose in the air. He, standing up now, his left arm passed round a chimney-pot, leant over.

"Have you seen my wife?" asked he.

"No, indeed," replied the doorkeeper. "Is she this way?"

"She's coming to meet me. And are your people all well?"

"Why, yes, thanks; I'm the most ill, as you see. I'm going to the Chaussée Clignancourt for a small leg of mutton. The butcher near the Moulin-Rouge only charges sixteen sous."

They raised their voices, because a vehicle was passing. In the wide, deserted Rue de la Nation, their words, shouted out with all their might, had only caused a little old woman to come to her window; and this little old woman remained there resting on her elbows, giving herself the treat of a grand emotion by watching that man on the roof opposite her, as though she expected every minute to see him fall.

"Well! good-evening," cried Madame Boche. "I don't wish to disturb you."

Coupeau turned round, and took back the iron that Zidore was holding for him. But just as the doorkeeper was moving off, she caught sight of Gervaise on the opposite pavement, holding Nana by the hand. She was already raising her head to tell the zinc-worker, when the young woman closed her mouth by an energetic gesture, and in a low voice, so as not to be heard up there, she told her of her fear; she was afraid, by showing herself too quickly, of giving her husband a start, which might make him fall down. During four years, she had only been once to find him at his work. That day was the second time. She could not look on it, her blood turned cold when she beheld her husband between Heaven and earth, in places where even the sparrows would not venture.

"No doubt, it's not pleasant," murmured Madame Boche. "My husband's a tailor, so I have none of these fears."

"If you only knew, at first," said Gervaise again, "I had frights from morning to night. I was always seeing him on a stretcher, with his head smashed. Now, I don't think of it so much. One gets used to everything. Bread must be earned. All the same, it's a precious dear loaf, for one risks one's bones oftener than is one's own turn."

She stopped speaking, hiding Nana in her skirt, fearing a cry from the little one. Very pale, she looked up in spite of herself. Just then Coupeau was soldering the

extreme edge of the sheet close to the gutter; he slid down as far as possible, but without being able to reach the edge. Then, full of freedom and heaviness, he risked himself with those slow movements peculiar to workmen. For an instant he was immediately over the pavement, no longer holding on, engrossed by his work; and, from below, one could see the little white flame of the solder frizzling up beneath the iron. Gervaise, speechless, her throat tightening with anguish, had clasped her hands together, and held them up in a mechanical gesture of prayer. But she breathed freely as Coupeau got up and returned back along the roof, without hurrying himself, and taking the time to spit once more into the street.

"Ah! you spy!" cried he, gaily, on beholding her. "She's been so stupid, hasn't she, Madame Boche? she wouldn't call to me. Wait a bit, I shall only be ten minutes."

He finished his soldering, and called to Gervaise,—

"There, it's done. I'm coming down."

The chimney-pot to which he had to fix the capital was in the middle of the roof. Gervaise, quite easy now, continued to smile as she followed his movements. Nana, amused all on a sudden by the view of her father, clapped her little hands. She had seated herself on the pavement to see the better to the roof.

"Papa! papa!" called she with all her might. "Papa, only look!"

The zinc-worker wished to lean forward, but his foot slipped. Then suddenly, stupidly, like a cat with its legs twisted together, he rolled and descended the slight slope of the roof without being able to catch himself.

"Name of God!" said he in a stifled voice.

And he fell. His body described a slight curve, turned twice over on itself, and came smashing into the middle of the street, with the dull thud of a bundle of clothes, thrown from a height.

Gervaise, stupid, her throat rent by one great cry,

stood with her arms in the air. Some passers-by hastened to the spot; a crowd formed. Madame Boche, quite upset, her knees bending under her, took Nana in her arms, to hide her head and prevent her seeing.

Four men ended by carrying Coupeau into a chemist's shop at the corner of Rue des Poissonniers; and he remained there on a blanket, in the middle of the shop, whilst they sent to the Lariboisière hospital for a stretcher. He still breathed, but the chemist slightly shook his head. Meanwhile, Gervaise, kneeling on the ground, sobbed continuously, her face bathed in tears, blinded, stupefied. With a mechanical movement she thrust out her hands, and felt her husband's limbs very gently. Then she drew them back, looking at the chemist, who had forbidden her to touch him; and a few seconds later she did it again, unable to resist the desire to feel if he were still warm, and imagining she did him good. When the stretcher at length arrived, and they talked of starting for the hospital, she got up, saying violently,—

“No, no; not to the hospital! We live in the Rue Neuve de la Goutte-d'Or.”

They tried to explain to her that the illness would cost her a great deal of money if she took her husband home. She obstinately repeated,—

“Rue Neuve de la Goutte-d'Or; I will show you the door. What can it matter to you? I've got money. He's my husband, isn't he? He's mine, and I will have him.”

And they had to take Coupeau to his own home. When the stretcher was carried through the crowd, which was crushing up against the chemist's shop, the women of the neighbourhood were talking excitedly of Gervaise. She limped, the creature, but all the same she had some pluck. She would be sure to save her good man, whilst at the hospital doctors gave the left arm to patients who were very bad, so as not to have the trouble of curing them. Madame Boche, after taking Nana home with her, returned and gave her account of the accident, with

interminable details, and still feeling agitated with emotion.

"I was going to buy a leg of mutton; I was there, I saw him fall," she repeated. "It was all because of the little one; he turned to look at her, and bang! Ah! good God! I don't want ever to see such a sight again. However, I must be off to get my leg of mutton."

For eight days Coupeau was very bad. The family, the neighbours, everyone expected to see him turn up his eyes at any moment. The doctor—a very expensive doctor, who charged five francs for each visit—apprehended internal injuries, and this filled everyone with fear. It was said in the neighbourhood that the zinc-worker's heart had been injured by the shock. Gervaise alone, pale in consequence of her nights of watching, serious and determined, shrugged her shoulders. Her good man's right leg was broken, everyone knew that; it would be set for him, and that was all. As for the rest, the injured heart, that was nothing. She would mend his heart for him. She knew the way to mend hearts—with care, cleanliness, and solid friendship. And she showed a superb conviction, certain of curing him, merely by remaining beside him, and touching him with her hands in the hour of fever. For a whole week she kept on her feet, speaking but little, wrapped up in her obstinacy of saving him, forgetting her children, the street, the whole city. The ninth day—the day on which the doctor at last answered for his patient's recovery—she fell on to a chair, her legs quite weak, her back almost broken, and melting in tears. That night she consented to sleep for two hours, her head leaning on the foot of the bed.

Coupeau's accident had put the family quite into a way. Mother Coupeau passed the nights with Gervaise; but always at nine o'clock she fell asleep on a chair. Every evening, on returning from work, Madame Lerat went a long round out of her way to inquire the news. At first the Lorilleux had called two or three times a day, offering to sit up and watch, and even bringing an easy-chair for

Gervaise. Then disputes were not slow to arise as to the proper way to nurse the sick. Madame Lorilleux pretended to have saved the lives of enough people in her lifetime to know how to go about it. She accused the young woman of behaving roughly to her, of keeping her away from her brother's bedside. The Hobbler was certainly right in wishing to save Coupeau; for there was no doubt that if she had not gone and disturbed him in the Rue de la Nation, he would never have fallen. Only, by the way she went to work, she was certain to despatch him.

When she saw that Coupeau was out of danger, Gervaise ceased guarding his bedside with so much jealous fierceness. Now, they could no longer kill him, and she let people approach without mistrust. The family invaded the room. The convalescence would be a very long one; the doctor had talked of four months. Then, during the long hours the zinc-worker slept, the Lorilleux spoke of Gervaise as of a fool. She had done a smart thing in having her husband at home. At the hospital, they would have had him on his feet twice as quickly. Lorilleux would have liked to have been ill, to have caught no matter what ailment, just to show her that he did not hesitate for a moment to go to Lariboisière.

One night Madame Lorilleux had the spitefulness to ask her suddenly,—

“Well! and your shop, when are you going to take it?”

“Yes,” chuckled Lorilleux, “the factor’s still waiting for you.”

Gervaise was bursting with anger. She had completely forgotten the shop; but she saw the wicked joy of these people at the thought that now the shop idea was blown up. From that evening, in fact, they watched for every opportunity to twit her about her dream which had “fallen into the water.” When anyone spoke of some impossible wish, they would say it might be realised on the day that Gervaise would be a shop-mistress in a

beautiful shop opening on to the street. And behind her back they would laugh consumedly. She did not like to have such unkind thoughts ; but, really, the Lorilleux now seemed to be very pleased at Coupeau's accident, as it prevented her from setting up as a laundress in the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or.

Then she also wished to laugh, and show them how willingly she parted with the money for the curing of her husband. Each time that she took the savings-bank book from beneath the glass clock-cover in their presence, she would say gaily,—

“ I'm going out ; I'm going to rent my shop.”

She had not been willing to withdraw the money all at once. She took out a hundred francs occasionally, so as not to keep such a lot of gold and silver in her drawer ; then, too, she vaguely hoped for some miracle, some sudden recovery, which would enable them not to part with the entire sum. At each journey to the savings-bank, when she got home, she added up on a bit of paper the money they had still left there. It was only for the sake of order. Although the hole was increasing in size, she still kept, in her sensible way and with her quiet smile, the account of this downfall of their savings. Was it not already a consolation that the money was being put to such a good use, to have had it under one's palm at the time of their misfortune ? And without a regret she, with careful hand, replaced the book behind the clock, under the glass cover.

The Goujets were very kind to Gervaise during Coupeau's illness. Madame Goujet was perfectly at her disposal. She never went out without asking her if she wanted any sugar, or butter, or salt brought in ; she always offered her the first plateful on the evenings when she made soup ; and she even, when she saw her very busy, looked after her cooking, or gave her a hand to wash up. Every morning Goujet took the young woman's pails and filled them at the well in the Rue des Poissonniers ; it was a saving of two sous. Then after

dinner, when the family connections did not invade the room, the Goujets would come and keep the Coupeaus company. For two hours, up to ten o'clock, the blacksmith smoked his pipe, as he watched Gervaise hovering round the sick man. He did not utter ten words the entire evening. With his big fair face set between his colossal shoulders, he was moved at seeing her pour the "tixane" into a cup, and stir up the sugar without making any noise with the spoon. And the blacksmith, in that atmosphere of devotion, in the midst of those drugs lying about on the furniture, was seized with a great affection for Gervaise, as he beheld her loving and nursing Coupeau with all her heart.

"Well! old man, you're mended at last," he said one day to the convalescent. "I never thought it would be otherwise; your wife is like the good God!"

He was going to marry. At least, his mother had found a very suitable young girl, a lace-mender like herself, whom she longed to see him wed. So as not to grieve her, he had said "yes," and the wedding had even been settled to take place in the beginning of September. The money to begin the housekeeping upon had been waiting a long time in the savings-bank. But he shook his head whenever Gervaise spoke to him of this marriage, and he murmured in his slow voice,—

"All women are not like you, Madame Coupeau. If all women were like you, one would want to marry ten of them."

At the end of two months, Coupeau was able to get up. He did not walk far, only from the bed to the window, and even then supported by Gervaise. There he would sit down in the easy-chair the Lorilleux had sent, with his right leg stretched out on a stool. This jester, who used to laugh at the people who broke their legs on frosty days, felt greatly put out by his accident. He had no philosophy. He had spent those two months in bed, in cursing, and in annoying the people about him. It was not an existence, really, to pass one's life on one's

back, with a shank all tied up, and as stiff as a sausage. Then, when he was installed in the arm-chair, it was another annoyance. Would he be fixed there for long, just like a mummy? The street was not so very amusing; no one ever passed there, and it smelt of chemical water all day long. And he was constantly uttering violent accusations against fate. His accident was not just; it ought never to have happened to him—a good workman, not an idle chap nor a drunkard. Had it happened to some others, he could have understood it.

“Papa Coupeau,” said he, “broke his neck one day when he was screwed. I can’t say that it was deserved, but, at least, the thing was explainable. I had had nothing, was as quiet as the Baptist, and without a drop of liquor in my body; and yet I must ‘go a mucker,’ just because I wanted to turn round to laugh to Nana. Don’t you think that’s too much? If there is a good God, He certainly arranges things in a very queer way. I for one shall never take it in.”

And when at last he was able to use his legs, he retained a secret grudge against his work. It was a trade full of misfortunes to pass one’s days, like the cats, among the roof-gutters. They were no fools the masters, they sent you to your death—being far too cowardly to venture themselves on a ladder—and stopped at home in safety at their firesides without caring for the poorer classes; and he got to the point of saying that every one ought to fix the zinc himself on his own house. Well, goodness knows! in the name of justice it should be so; if you don’t want the water to come in, cover the roof yourself. Then he regretted not having learned some other handicraft, something more pleasant and less dangerous; for instance, that of a cabinet-maker. It was all old Coupeau’s fault; fathers always had that stupid habit of making their children learn the same trade as themselves.

For another two months Coupeau walked about on crutches. He had, first of all, managed to get as far as

the street, and smoke his pipe before the door. Then he had managed to reach the exterior Boulevard, dragging himself along in the sun, and remaining for hours seated on a bench. Gaiety returned to him; his tongue got sharper in these long hours of idleness. And with the pleasure of living, he gained there a delight in doing nothing, an indolent feeling took possession of his limbs, and his muscles gradually glided into a very sweet slumber.

On the afternoons when Coupeau felt dull, he would call on the Lorilleux. The latter would pity him immensely, and attract him with all sorts of amiable attentions. During the first years following his marriage he had avoided them, thanks to Gervaise's influence. Now they regained their sway over him, by twitting him about the fear he had of his wife. He was no man, that was evident. The Lorilleux, however, showed great discretion, and sang wonderfully the praises of the laundress's good qualities. Coupeau, without as yet coming to a dispute, swore to the latter that his sister adored her, and requested that she would be less disagreeable to her. The first quarrel which the couple had occurred one evening as to Etienne. The zinc-worker had passed the afternoon with the Lorilleux. On arriving home, as the dinner was not quite ready, and the children were whining for their soup, he suddenly turned upon Etienne, and boxed his ears for him. And for a whole hour he grumbled on: the rascal was not his, he did not know why he allowed him to be in the house; he would end by turning him out into the street. Up till then he had tolerated the youngster without much ado. The next day he talked of his dignity. Three days after, he kept cuffing the little fellow morning and evening, so much so, that the child, whenever he heard him coming, dashed into the Goujets', where the old lace-mender kept a corner of the table for him to do his lessons.

Gervaise had, for some time past, returned to work. She no longer had any need to look under the glass cover

of the clock ; all the savings were eaten up ; and she had to work hard, work for four, for there were four mouths at the table now. She maintained the whole of them. Whenever people pitied her, she at once found excuses for Coupeau. Just recollect, he had suffered so much ; it was not surprising if his disposition had got embittered. But it would pass off with renewed health. And if anyone suggested that Coupeau seemed all right again, that he could very well return to his work, she protested :—No, no ; not yet ! She did not want to see him take to his bed again. She knew best what the doctor said, perhaps. It was she who prevented him from going to work, telling him every morning to take time and not to force himself. She even slipped twenty sou pieces into his waistcoat pocket. Coupeau accepted this as something perfectly natural. He complained of all sorts of ailments, in order to be petted ; at the end of six months his convalescence was going on still. On the days when he went to look at the others working, he was always willing to go and have a drink with his companions. One was, all the same, not badly off at the wine-shop ; one stayed there joking, just for five minutes. That did not dishonour anybody. It was only fools who satisfied their thirst by standing at the door. Those who chaffed him before were quite right, for a glass of wine never yet killed a man.

Little by little, however, the young woman got sad. Morning and night she went to the Rue de la Goutte-d'Orr to look at the shop, which was still to be let ; and she would hide herself as if she had committed some childish trick unworthy of a grown-up person. This shop was beginning to turn her head. At night, when the light was out, she experienced the charm of some forbidden pleasure in thinking of it with her eyes open. She made her calculations anew : two hundred and fifty francs for the rent, one hundred and fifty francs for utensils and moving, one hundred francs in hand to keep up the household expenses for a fortnight—in all five hundred francs at the very lowest figure. If she was not continually

talking of it aloud, it was for fear of appearing to regret the savings swallowed up by Coupeau's illness. She often became quite pale, having almost allowed her desire to escape her, and catching back her words, quite confused, as though she had been thinking of something wrong. Now they would have to work for four or five years before they could lay by them such a large sum. Her regret was at not being able to start in business at once; she would have earned all the household required, without counting on Coupeau, letting him take months to recover his taste for work again; she would have been quite easy, and certain of the future, and free from the secret fears which sometimes seized her when he returned home very gay and singing, and relating some funny jest of that animal, Mes-Bottes, with whom he had cracked a bottle.

One evening, Gervaise being at home alone, Goujet entered, and did not rush off again, according to his habit. He seated himself, and smoked as he watched her. He seemed to have something very serious to say; he thought it over, let it ripen, without being able to put it into a suitable form of speech. At length, after a long silence, he made up his mind, and took his pipe out of his mouth to say all in a breath,—

“Madame Gervaise, will you allow me to lend you some money?”

She was leaning over a drawer in her wardrobe, looking for some cloths. She got up, her face very red. He had seen her, then, in the morning, standing in ecstasy before the shop for nearly ten minutes. He was smiling in an embarrassed way, as though he had made some stupid proposal. But she hastily refused. Never would she accept money without knowing when she would be able to return it. Then also it was concerning too large an amount. And as he insisted, looking quite frightened, she ended by exclaiming,—

“But your marriage? I never could take the money you’ve in hand for your marriage.”

“Oh! don’t let that trouble you,” he replied, turning

red in his turn. "I'm not going to be married now. It's an idea of mine, you know. Really, I would much sooner lend you the money."

Then they both held down their heads. There was something very agreeable between them to which they did not give expression. And Gervaise accepted. Goujet had told his mother beforehand. They crossed the landing, and went to see her at once. The lace-mender was very grave, and looked rather sad as she bent her calm face over her tambour-frame. She would not thwart her son, but she no longer approved Gervaise's project; and she frankly told her why. Coupeau was turning out badly; Coupeau would swallow up her shop. She especially could not forgive the zinc-worker for having refused to learn to read during his convalescence. The blacksmith had offered to teach him, but the other had sent him off, saying that learning made people get thin. This had almost caused a quarrel between the two workmen; each went his own way. Madame Goujet, however, seeing her big boy's beseeching glances, was very kind to Gervaise. It was settled that they would lend their neighbours the five hundred francs they wanted; the amount was to be repaid by instalments of twenty francs a month. It would last as long as it lasted.

"I say, the blacksmith's making 'sheeps' eyes' at you!" exclaimed Coupeau, laughing, when he heard what had taken place. "Oh! I'm quite easy; he's too much of a ninny. We'll pay him back his money. But really, if he had to do with some people, he'd be prettily sold."

The next day the Coupeaus took the shop. All day long Gervaise was running from the Rue Neuve to the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. When the neighbours saw her pass thus, nimble and delighted to the extent that she no longer limped, they said that she must have undergone some operation.

CHAPTER V.

THE Boches had left the Rue des Poissonniers since the April term, and were now taking charge of the great house in the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. It was really quite an extraordinary and strange coincidence. One of the troubles of Gervaise, who had lived so quietly in her lodgings in the Rue Neuve, was the thought of returning under the subjection of some disagreeable person, with whom she would be continually quarrelling, either because of a little water spilt, or of a door shut too noisily at night. Door-keepers are such an unpleasant lot ! But it would be a pleasure to be with the Boches. They knew one another—they would always get on well together. It would be like the same family.

On the day of the letting, when the Coupeaus went to sign the agreement, Gervaise felt her heart very big as she passed through the high doorway. She was then, at length, going to live in that house as vast as a little town, stretching out with its interminable staircases, and passages as long and winding as streets. On that day the water flowing from the dyer's under the entrance porch was a very pale apple green. She smilingly stepped over it ; to her the colour was a pleasant omen.

The meeting with the landlord was to take place in the Boches' room. M. Marescot, a wealthy cutler of the Rue de la Prix, had at one time turned a grindstone along the streets. He was now stated to be rich to the extent of several millions of francs. He was a man of fifty-five, strong, bony, and decorated, and had a habit of spreading

out his immense labourer's hands, and one of his delights was to get hold of his tenants' knives and scissors, which he would sharpen himself just for pleasure. The Coupeau's found him seated before Madame Boche's greasy table, listening to how the dressmaker on the second floor, staircase A, had refused to pay her rent, using an objectionable expression. Then, when the lease was signed, he shook hands with the zinc-worker. As for him, he liked workmen. He had had plenty of hard work himself once. But work accomplished everything. And, after counting the two hundred and fifty francs for the first half-year in advance, and dropping them into his wide pocket, he related his history, and showed his decoration.

Gervaise, however, felt rather annoyed by the Boches' behaviour. They pretended not to know her. They pressed round the landlord, bowing down to him, watching for his least words, and nodding their approval of them. Boche again spoke of the dressmaker on the second floor; he recommended that she should be turned out; he reckoned up the quarters she was in debt with the importance of a steward whose management might be compromised. M. Marescot approved the suggestion of turning her out, but he wished to wait till the term was half over. It was hard to turn people out into the street, more especially as it did not put a sou into the landlord's pocket. And Gervaise asked herself, with a slight shudder, if she too would be turned out into the street the day that some misfortune rendered her unable to pay.

The following Monday, the workmen began to do up the shop. The purchasing of the paper turned out especially to be a considerable matter. Gervaise wanted a grey paper, with blue flowers, so as to enliven and brighten the walls. Boche offered to take her to the paper-hangers, so that she might choose. But the landlord had given him formal instructions not to go beyond the price of fifteen sous the piece. They were an hour at the warehouse. The laundress kept looking in despair at a very pretty chintz pattern, costing eighteen sous the

piece, and thought all the other papers hideous. At length the doorkeeper gave in; he would arrange the matter, and, if necessary, would reckon that there was a piece more needed than was the case. So, on her way home, Gervaise purchased some tarts for Pauline. She did not like being behindhand—one always gained by behaving nicely to the child.

The shop was to be ready in four days. The workmen were there three weeks.

The moving in took place immediately after. During the first few days Gervaise felt as delighted as a child whenever she crossed the road on returning from some errand. She lingered to smile at her home. From a distance her shop appeared light and gay, with its pale blue signboard, on which the word "Laundress" was painted in great yellow letters, amidst the black row of the other frontages. In the window, closed in at the bottom by little muslin curtains, and hung with blue paper to show off the whiteness of the linen, some shirts were displayed, with some women's caps with the strings tied to wires. And she thought her shop looked pretty being the same colour as the sky. Inside there was more blue; the paper in the style of a Pompadour chintz, represented a trellis overgrown with convolvuli. The work-table, an immense piece of furniture, which filled two-thirds of the place, was covered with a thick cloth, and draped round with a piece of cretonne displaying large blue flowers, so as to hide the trestles. Gervaise would seat herself on a stool breathing quite contentedly, and delighted with all the beautiful cleanliness, as she devoured her new belongings with her eyes; but her first look was invariably given to her stove, a cast-iron stove, where ten irons, ranged round the fire on slanting plates, could heat at the same time. She would go down on her knees and look with a constant dread, fearing that her little stupid of an apprentice was making the cast-iron crack by stuffing in too much coke.

In the neighbourhood, the new shop produced a great

sensation. The Coupeaus were accused of going too fast, and making too much commotion. They had, in fact, spent the five hundred francs lent by the Goujets in fitting up and installing themselves in the shop, without keeping sufficient to live upon for a fortnight, as they had intended. The morning that Gervaise took down her shutters for the first time, she had just six francs in her purse. But that did not put her about, for customers began to arrive, and things seemed to promise well. Eight days later, on the Saturday, before going to bed, she remained two hours making calculations on a piece of paper, and she awoke Coupeau to tell him, with a bright look on her face, that there were hundreds and thousands of francs to be made if they only went about the matter rightly.

"Ah, well!" said Madame Lorilleux all over the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or, "my fool of a brother sees some funny things. All that was wanting was that the Hobbler should knock about. It suits her well, doesn't it?"

The Lorilleux had declared war to the death against Gervaise. To begin with, they had almost burst with rage during the time while the repairs were being done to the shop. If they caught sight of the painters from the distance, they would walk on the other side, and go up to their rooms with their teeth clenched. A blue shop for that "nobody," it was enough to break the arms of all honest, hard-working people. So, on the second day, as the apprentice was emptying a basin of starch water in the street, just as Madame Lorilleux was going out, the latter drew the whole street round her by accusing her sister-in-law of making her work-girls insult her. And all intercourse was broken off; whenever they met now, they only exchanged the most terrible looks.

"Yes, she leads a pretty life!" Madame Lorilleux said over and over again. "We all know where the money came from that she paid for her business place. She earned it with the blacksmith; and he again springs from a nice family. Didn't the father cut his own throat to

save the guillotine the trouble? Anyhow, there was some disreputable story of that sort!"

She very plainly accused Gervaise of being too intimate with Goujet. She lied—she pretended she had surprised them one night on a bench on the exterior Boulevards. The thought of this intimacy, of the pleasures that her sister-in-law was no doubt enjoying, exasperated her still more, in her enforced virtue as an ugly woman. Every day the cry came from her heart to her lips,—

"But whatever is it, she has, that cripple, that people should fall in love with her? Why does nobody love me?"

Then there was endless talks with the neighbours. She told the whole story. Ah! she had led them a fine dance on the wedding-day. Oh! she had a strong scent, and she saw then how it was going to turn out. Only, later, goodness gracious! the Hobbler had made herself so pleasant, she was such a hypocrite, that she and her husband had consented, for Coupeau's sake, to be Nana's godfather and godmother; and it had cost something a christening like that. But now, you know, the Hobbler might be at death's door, and in want of a glass of water, yet she would certainly never give it to her. She did not like insolent persons, nor hussies. As for Nana, she would always be welcome whenever she came to see her godfather and godmother; the little one was not to be blamed for her mother's crimes.

The Boches, however, severe judges of household quarrels said that the Lorilleux were in the wrong. The Lorilleux were no doubt respectable persons, quiet, working the whole day long, and paying their ren' regularly. But, really, jealousy had demented them. With all that, too, they would have "tried to skin a flint." Regular misers, there was no other word for them; people who hid away their bottle of wine whenever anyone called, so as not to have to offer a glass. In short, they were not nice people.

"It isn't to be wondered at!" Madame Lorilleux

would exclaim, "the Hobbler's for ever stuffing them, the gluttons! Ah! they're all the same; but they had better not annoy me. I'll go and complain to the landlord. Only yesterday, I saw that sly old beggar Boche rubbing against Madame Gaudron's skirts. Just fancy; coquetting with a woman of that age, and who has half-a-dozen children, too. If I catch 'em at anything of the sort again, I'll tell Madame Boche, and she'll give her old man a thrashing. Gracious! that will be something to laugh at."

Mother Coupeau continued to visit the two households, saying just what every one else said, and even managing to get asked oftener to dinner, by complaisantly listening one night to her daughter and her daughter-in-law on alternate evenings. For the present Madame Lerat had ceased calling on the Coupeaus, because she had quarrelled with the Hobbler; and she had increased her sister's resentment by assuring her that the Hobbler, in the course of conversation, before fifteen or twenty persons had called her Cow's Tail, without discomposing herself. Good Heavens! the Boches, the neighbours all called her Cow's Tail now.

In the midst of all this scandal, Gervaise, quiet and smiling at the door of her shop, greeted her friends with an affectionate little nod of the head. She delighted to come there for a minute, and leave her ironing, to laugh at the street, with the vanity of a shopkeeper who has a bit of the pavement opposite to her. The Rue de la Goutte-d'Or seemed hers, and the adjacent streets, and the whole neighbourhood. When she stretched out her head, with her loose white jacket on, her arms bare, her fair hair which had come undone in the heat of her work, she would cast a glance to the left and another to the right, at both ends, so as to take in at once the passers-by, the houses, the pavement, and the sky. To the left was the Rue de Goutte-d'Or, quiet and deserted like a corner in the provinces, where women were conversing in a low tone at their street doors. To the right, a few

paces away, the Rue des Poissonniers gave forth its noise of passing vehicles, its continual treading of a crowd which came from all directions, and filled that part with a dense multitude. At the greengrocer's and the tripe-seller's she could see corners of counters on which superb cats sat purring. Her neighbour, Madame Vigouroux, the charcoal-dealer, returned her salutation. She was a little fat woman, with bright eyes and a dark face, and was passing the time laughing with some men, and leaning against her shop front, to which logs of wood, painted on a background the colour of wine lees, gave the appearance of a rustic hut. Mesdames Cudorge, mother and daughter, her other neighbours, who kept the umbrella shop, never showed themselves; their window always having a sombre look, and their door, ornamented with two little zinc parasols covered with a thick coat of bright vermillion was invariably closed.

But, before going in again, Gervaise always gave a glance over the way at a great white wall without a window, pierced by an immense gateway, through which one could see the flare of a forge, in a courtyard full of carts and covered vans, standing with their shafts up in the air. On the wall the word "Farriery" was painted in long letters, surrounded by a fan made up of horse-shoes. All day long the hammers resounded on the anvil, and clouds of sparks lighted up the pale shadows of the courtyard.

The neighbourhood in general thought Gervaise very pretty. There was, it is true, a good deal of scandal spoken regarding her; but with one voice everybody granted that she had large eyes, a small mouth, with very white teeth. In short, she was a pretty blonde, and had it not been for her unfortunate leg, she might have ranked amongst the really beautiful. She was in her twenty-eighth year, and had grown considerably stouter. Her fine features were becoming slightly full, and her gestures had assumed a pleasant indolence. At times she occasionally seemed to forget herself on the edge of

a chair, waiting for her iron to heat, with a vague smile, and with an expression of greedy joy upon her face. She was lucky, as all her neighbours said; everything prospered with her. She did the washing for all the house—M. Madinier, Mademoiselle Remanjou, the Boches. She had even some of the customers of her old employer, Madame Fauconnier—Parisian ladies living in the Rue du Faubourg-Poissonniere. After her second week, she was obliged to engage two workwomen Madame Putois and the big Clemence, the girl who used to live on the sixth floor; counting her apprentice, that little squint-eyed Augustine, who was as ugly as a beggar's breech, that made three persons in her employ. Others would certainly have lost their heads at such a piece of good fortune. It was excusable for her to feast a little on Monday, after drudging through the entire week. Besides, it was necessary to her. She would have been useless otherwise, and would have expected to see the shirts iron themselves if she had not been able to line her stomach with something good, the desire for which tickled her appetite.

Never before had Gervaise shown so much complaisance.

It was to Coupeau especially that Gervaise behaved so well. Never an angry word, never a complaint behind her husband's back. The zinc-worker had at last resumed work; and as his employment was at the other side of Paris, she gave him every morning forty sous for his luncheon, his drink, and his tobacco. Only, two days out of every six, Coupeau would stop on the way, drink the forty sous with a friend, and return home to lunch with some grand story or other. Once even he did not take the trouble to go far; he treated himself, Mes-Bottes, and three others to a regular feast—snails, roast meat, and some sealed bottles of wine—at the "Capuchin," on the Barriere de la Chapelle. Then, as his forty sous were not sufficient, he had sent the waiter to his wife with the bill, and to say that he was under

lock for the balance. She laughed, and shrugged her shoulders. Where was the harm if her good man amused himself a little? You must give men a long rein if you want to live peaceably at home. From one word to another, one soon arrived at blows. Gracious powers! it was easy to understand. Coupeau still suffered from his leg; besides, he was drawn in sometimes. He was obliged to do as the others did, or else he would pass for a muff. Besides, it was really a matter of no consequence. If he came home a little bit elevated, he went to bed, and two hours afterwards he was all right again.

The warm time of the year had now arrived. One June afternoon, a Saturday when the work was pressing, Gervaise herself had piled the coke into the stove, around which ten irons were heating, whilst a rumbling sound issued from the chimney. At that hour the sun was shining full on the shop-front, and the pavement reflected an ardent recoil, causing strange shadows to dance over the ceiling; and that blaze of light, which assumed a bluish tinge from the reflection of the paper on the shelves, and against the window, was almost blinding in the intensity with which it shone over the ironing-table, like a sunny dust shaken amongst the fine linen. This made the atmosphere stifling. The shop door was thrown wide open, but not a breath of air entered; the clothes, which were hung up on brass wires to dry in the air, steamed, and became as stiff as shavings in less than three-quarters of an hour. For some little while past an oppressive silence had reigned in that furnace-like heat, in the midst of which was heard the smothered sound of the banging down of the irons on the thick blanket covered with calico.

"Ah, well!" said Gervaise, "are we not melting to-day? One scarcely wants any clothes on at all."

She was sitting on the floor, in front of a basin, starching some things. She had on a white petticoat and a loose linen jacket, with the sleeves rolled up, showing

her bare arms and neck ; and she looked quite rosy, and was perspiring to that extent that little blonde locks of her disordered hair were sticking to her skin. She carefully dipped into the milky water, caps, men's shirt-fronts, entire petticoats, and the trimmings of women's garments. Then she rolled the things up, and placed them in a square basket, after dipping her hand in a pail and shaking it over the parts of the shirts and things which she had not starched.

"This basketful's for you, Madame Putois," she went on. "Look sharp, now! It dries at once, and will need to be done all over again in an hour."

Madame Putois, a woman of forty-five, little and thin, was ironing without a drop of perspiration, buttoned up in an old chestnut-coloured dress. She had not even taken her cap off, a black cap trimmed with green ribbons turned nearly yellow. And she stood perfectly stiff in front of the ironing table, which was too high for her, her elbows in the air, and moving her iron with the jerky evolutions of a marionette.

Gervaise was passing a little iron, rounded at both ends, over the inside of the crown of a cap belonging to Madame Boche, when a bony-looking woman entered the shop, her face covered with red blotches, and her skirts quite soaking. It was a mistress washerwoman who employed three assistants at the wash-house in the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or.

"You've come too soon, Madame Bijard," cried Gervaise. "I told you to come this evening. You see I'm so busy now."

But as the washerwoman began lamenting and fearing that she would not be able to put up all the things to soak that day, she consented to give her the dirty linen at once. They went to fetch the bundles in the left-hand room where Etienne slept, and returned with enormous armfuls, which they piled up on the floor at the back of the shop. The sorting lasted quite half-an-hour. Whenever she came across anything belonging to

a new customer, she marked it with a cross in red thread, so as to know it again. And from all this dirty linen which they were throwing about there issued an offensive odour in the warm atmosphere.

"Oh, there! hallo! what a smell!" said Clemence, holding her nose.

"Of course there is. If it were all sweet, they wouldn't send it us," quietly explained Gervaise. "It smells as it ought to, that's all. We said fourteen skirts, didn't we, Madame Bijard? Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen——"

And she continued counting aloud. Just as she was shaking out a child's dirty frock, Coupeau came in.

"By Jove!" he hiccuped, "what a sun. It smacks you on the head." The zinc-worker caught hold of the ironing-table to keep himself from falling. It was the first time he had taken such a dose. Until then he had sometimes come home lively, but nothing more. This time, however, he had a knob eye, just a friendly slap he run against in fun. His curly hair, already showing white threads, must have dusted a corner in some low wine-shop, for a cobweb was hanging to one of his locks at the back of his neck. He remained as funny as ever, though his features were a little drawn and aged, and his under jaw projected more; but he was always lively, as he would sometimes say, and his skin was still tender enough to make a duchess envious.

"I'll just tell you," he went on, addressing Gervaise. "It was Celery-Root, you know him—the chap with a wooden shank. Well, as he was going back to his native place, he wanted to treat us. Oh! we were all right, if it hadn't been for that beast of a sun. In the street everybody's ill. Really, all the world's screwed!"

And as tall Clemence laughed at his thinking that he had seen all the people in the street drunk, he was himself seized with an intense fit of gaiety which almost strangled him.

"Look at 'em! the blessed tipplers! Aren't they

funny?" he cried. "But it's not their fault, it's only the sun."

All the shop laughed, even Madame Putois, who did not like drunkards. That squint-eyed Augustine was clucking like a hen suffocating, with her mouth wide open. Gervaise, however, suspected Coupeau of not having come straight home, but of having passed an hour with the Lorilleux, from whom he had got bad advice. When he swore that he had not, she laughed also full of indulgence, and not even reproaching him with having lost another day's work.

"Good God! what nonsense he does talk," she murmured. "How can he say such stupid things?" Then, in a maternal tone of voice, she added, "Now go to bed, won't you? You see we're busy; you put us about. That makes thirty-two handkerchiefs, Madame Bijard; and two more, thirty-four."

But Coupeau was not sleepy. He remained there wagging his body from side to side, like the pendulum of a clock, and chuckling in an obstinate and annoying manner. Gervaise, who wished to get rid of Madame Bijard, called Clemence, and made her count the things, whilst he wrote the figures down. Then this tall vulgarian made use of some coarse expression, uttered some foul remark respecting each article. She exposed the misery of the customers, the adventures of the alcoves, had workshop jests to crack upon every hole and every mark that passed through her hands. Augustine was as one who did not understand, pricking up her ears like a vicious little girl.

Gervaise, serious, and her mind fully occupied with what she was about, did not seem to hear. As she wrote she gave a glance to each article, so as to recognise it as passed before her; and she never made a mistake: she guessed the owner's name just by the look or the colour.

There, in the midst of that increasing flood of soiled linen she remained with her arms and her neck bare,

and little locks of her fair hair sticking to her temples, looking more rosy and languid than ever. She regained her sedate air, her smile of an attentive and careful mistress, forgetting everything except the work before her, rummaging with one hand amongst the heaps to see that no mistake had been made. That squint-eyed Augustine, who delighted in putting shovelfuls of coke into the stove, had filled it to such an extent that the cast-iron plates grew red hot. The sun was shining obliquely on the window; the shop was in a blaze. Then Coupeau, whom the great heat intoxicated all the more, was seized with a sudden fit of tenderness. He advanced towards Gervaise with open arms, and deeply moved.

"You're a good woman," he stuttered. "I must kiss you."

But he tripped in the petticoats which barred the way, and nearly fell.

"What a nuisance you are!" said Gervaise, without getting angry. "Keep quiet, we've done now."

No, he wanted to kiss her. He must do so, because he loved her so much. Whilst he stuttered, he turned the heap of petticoats, and stumbled; then as he obstinately persisted, his feet caught together, and he fell flat, his nose in the very midst of them. Gervaise, beginning to lose her temper, pushed him, declaring that he was mixing all the things up. But Clemence, and even Madame Putois, maintained that she was wrong. It was nice of him, after all. He wanted to kiss her. She might very well let him embrace her.

"You're lucky, you are, Madame Coupeau," said Madame Bijard, whom her drunkard of a husband, a locksmith, was killing with blows every night on returning home. "If my old man was like that, when he's had his nose out of joint, it would be a pleasure."

Gervaise, calmed now, was already regretting her hastiness. She helped Coupeau up on his legs again. Then she offered her cheek with a smile. But the zinc-

worker, without caring a button for the other people being present, seized her round the waist.

"It's not for the sake of saying so," he murmured; "but, I love you all the same, you see."

"Leave off you're tickling me," cried she, laughing louder. "What a big fool you are. How can you be so ridiculous?"

He had caught hold of her, and would not let her go. She abandoned herself, giddy from the slight faintness caused by the heap of clothes, and without repugnance for Coupeau's wine-bibbing breath. And the big kiss they exchanged full on each other's mouths, in the midst of the unpleasantness of the laundress's trade, was almost ominous of the first fall in the slow descent of their life.

Madame Bijard had commenced to tie the thing up in bundles. She talked of her little girl, two years old, whose name was Eulalie, and who was already as sensible as a grown-up woman. You could leave her by herself; she never cried, nor played with the matches. At length she carried off the bundles one by one, her tall body bending beneath the weight, her face streaked with purple blotches.

"It's no longer bearable; we're roasting," said Gervaise, wiping her face before returning to Madame Boche's cap.

And they talked of smacking Augustine's ears when they saw that the stove was red-hot. The irons, also, were getting in the same condition.

Augustine was dawdling over her stockings, her nose up in the air. As for tall Clemence, she had reached her thirty-fifth shirt since the morning.

"Always wine, never throat-burners!" suddenly said the zinc-worker, who felt the necessity of making this declaration. "Spirits make me drunk, I'll have none of 'em!"

They were pressed for time. Well! what? it was not his fault. He was doing no harm. He was not touching,

he was only looking. Was he no longer allowed to look at the beautiful things that the good God had made? The girl allowed him to go on, laughing at the coarse compliments of the drunken man. And she soon commenced to jest with him. He chaffed her about the shirts. So, she was always doing shirts? Hundreds and hundreds had passed through her hands? All the fair fellows and all the dark fellows of the neighbourhood wore her work on their backs. Yet she continued her work, her shoulders shaking with her laughter; Clemence handed her iron to Augustine; the apprentice finished up the irons on the stockings when they were no longer hot enough for the starched articles. But she took hold of this one so clumsily, that she made herself a cuff in the shape of a long burn on the wrist. And she sobbed and accused Clemence of having burnt her on purpose. The latter, who had gone to fetch a very hot iron for the shirt front, consoled her at once by threatening to iron her two ears if she went on. Then she placed a piece of flannel under the front, slowly passed the iron over it, giving the starch time to show up and dry. The shirt-front became as stiff and as shiny as cardboard.

"Go to bed, Monsieur Coupeau, it will be far better," exclaimed Madame Putois.

"Ah! well," he stuttered, without ceasing to chuckle, "you're all precious correct! So one mustn't amuse oneself any more?"

Gervaise, without any violence, seized hold of him with one hand, and placed the other on his mouth. He struggled, just by way of a joke, whilst she pushed him to the back of the shop, towards the room. He got his mouth free, and said he was ready to go to bed. Then Gervaise was heard taking his shoes off. She was undressing him, maternally scolding him the while.

When Gervaise returned to the shop, that squint-eyed Augustine was receiving a sound clout from Clemence. It was on account of a dirty iron, which Madame Putois had taken from the stove. She, not suspecting anything,

had blackened a whole jacket; and as Clemence, to avoid the imputation of not having cleaned her iron, accused Augustine, and swore by the great gods that she had not used it, in spite of the dab of burnt starch that was still sticking to it, the apprentice, incensed at such an unjust accusation, had openly spat on her dress, right in the front of it. And she had received a good sound smack in consequence. The squaint-eyed one kept back her tears, cleaned the iron by scraping and then by wiping it after having rubbed a piece of candle over it.

Gervaise continued goffering the lace of the cap. And in the sudden calm which ensued, one could hear Coupeau's husky voice issuing from the depths of the back shop. He was still quite happy, and was laughing to himself as he uttered scraps of phrases.

"How stupid she is, my wife! How stupid of her to put me to bed. Really! it's too absurd, in the middle of the day, when there's nothing wrong with one."

Suddenly, however, he began to snore. Then Gervaise, gave a sigh of relief, happy in knowing that he was at length quiet, and sleeping off his intoxication on two good mattresses. And she spoke out in the silence, in a slow and continuous voice, without taking her eyes off the little goffering irons, which she dexterously handled.

"You see, he hasn't his reason; I can't be angry. Were I to be nasty with him it would be of no use. I like to say just what he says, and get him to bed; then, at least, it's over at once, and I'm quiet. Besides, he isn't ill-natured; he loves me very much. You saw, just now, he would have run any risk to kiss me. That's very nice of him too; for they are many who, when they are tight, go elsewhere. But he comes straight home here. He jokes with you, but it doesn't go any further. Do you hear, Clemence? you mustn't be offended. You know what men are when they're tipsy; they'd kill father and mother, and not even have the faintest recollection of it afterwards. Oh, I forgive him with all my heart. He's like all the others, goodness knows!"

She said these words softly without passion, already used to Coupeau's larks, and taking to discoursing on his love for her. When she had finished silence ensued, and was not again broken. "Every time she wanted an article, Madame Putois took it from the basket, which she pulled out from under the cretonne hanging which adorned the table; then, when she had ironed it, she raised her little arms, and placed it on a shelf. Clemence was finishing folding her thirty-fifth shirt with the iron. There was no end of work; they had calculated that they would not get it finished till eleven that evening, even making all the haste they could.

On the morrow of his carouses, the zinc-worker always had a headache—a splitting headache, which kept him all day with his hair out of curl—whilst his breath was offensive and his mouth all swollen and askew. He rose late on such days, and he would dawdle about the shop, never making up his mind to start off to his work. It was another day lost. In the morning, he would complain that his legs were as though made of cotton, and would call himself a great fool to guzzle so much, as it broke one's constitution. But one met a host of good fellows, who would not go from one's elbow; so one boozed away in spite of oneself, one got caught in all sorts of traps, and ended by being nobbled, and nastily, too! Ah, gracious goodness! no, that would never happen to him again; he did not intend to turn up his toes in a pub, in the flower of his age. But, after his lunch, he would deck himself out, and hum! hum! just to prove that he still had a fine deep voice. He would begin to deny the carouse of the day before; he had, perhaps, been a little "squiffy." They no longer made such fellows as he, ever right as the nail, with the devil's own muscle, and able to drink anything without blinking an eye.

Then, for the whole afternoon, he would lounge about the place. When he had thoroughly annoyed the work-women, his wife would give him twenty sous to get out of their way. Off he would go then, and buy his tobacco

at the "Little Civet," in the Rue des Poissonniers, where he generally took a plum in brandy, whenever he met a friend. Next, he spent the rest of his twenty sous at old Francois's, at the corner of the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or, where there was a famous wine, quite young, which tickled one's gullet. It was a pub of the old pattern—a dark shop with a low ceiling, and a smoky room at the side in which they sold soup. And he would stop there till late in the evening, playing for drinks; he had credit from Francois, who had formally promised never to send the bill into the wife. One glass of wine leads to another. Besides, he was a good fellow, who would never do the least harm to the fair sex—fond of a spree, of course, and who coloured his nose to his turn, but in a nice way, full of contempt for those pigs of men who have given way to alcohol, and whom one never sees sober. He returned home as gay and as gallant as a lark.

"Has your lover been?" he would sometimes ask Gervaise, by way of teasing her. "I never see him now; I must go and look him up."

The lover was Goujet. He avoided, in fact, calling too often, for fear of annoying them, and also of causing people to talk. Yet he was accustomed to find pretexts, such as bringing the washing; and he would pass along the pavement twenty times a day. There was a corner at the back in which he liked to sit, without moving, for hours, and smoke his short pipe. Once every ten days, in the evening after his dinner, he would venture there and instal himself. And he was no talker; his mouth almost seemed sewn up, his eyes were fixed on Gervaise, and he only removed his pipe to laugh at everything she said. When the work went on late on a Saturday, he would seem to forget his personality, and appeared to amuse himself more than if he had gone to a theatre. At times the women were ironing up to three o'clock in the morning. A lamp hung by a wire from the ceiling; the shade of it cast a large circle of brilliant light, in which the linen looked like soft bundles of snow. The

apprentice put the shutters up ; but as the July nights were very hot, the street door was left open. And as the hour advanced, the women unfastened their dresses, so as to be more at their ease. They had fine skins, which seemed golden in the lamp-light, Gervaise's especially : she was becoming quite plump, her fair shoulders were glossy as silk, her neck was like a baby's, and had a little dimple, which Goujet could have drawn from memory, he knew it so well. Then he became oppressed by the fierce heat from the stove, and by the odour of the clothes steaming beneath the irons : and he gradually glided into a slight stupor, his mind slumbered, whilst his eyes became occupied with those women who were hurrying through their work, swinging their naked arms, spending their night in making their customers get up in Sunday style next day. Round about the shop, the neighbouring houses were slowly becoming wrapped in the great silence of sleep. Midnight struck, then one o'clock, then two o'clock. The vehicles and the crowd of passers-by had alike gone.

Goujet, seeing that Gervaise was embarrassed with Etienne, and wishing to deliver him from Coupeau's cuffs, had engaged him to go and blow the bellows at the factory where he was employed. The profession of bolt-maker, if one not to be proud of, on account of the dirt of the forge, and of the stupid-like work of constantly hammering on pieces of iron of a similar kind, was yet a well-paid one, at which ten and even twelve francs a day could be earned. The youngster, who was then twelve years old, would soon be able to begin the trade, if the calling was what he liked. And Etienne had thus become another link between the laundress and the blacksmith. The latter would bring the child home, and speak of his good conduct. Everyone laughingly said that Goujet had a passion for her. She knew it, and blushed like a young girl, the flush of modesty colouring her cheeks with the bright tints of the red apple. Ah ! the poor dear boy, he never put her about.

He had never spoken to her of it. One did not meet many of this honourable kind. And, without admitting it, she felt a great joy at being thus loved like a holy virgin. Whenever anything annoyed her much, she thought of the blacksmith, and that consoled her. If they found themselves alone together, they did not feel the least awkwardness; they smilingly looked each other full in the face, without saying what they felt.

Towards the end of the summer, Nana quite upset the household. She was six years old, and promised to be a regular good-for-nothing. So as not to have her always knocking about her feet, her mother took her every morning to a little school in the Rue Polonceau, kept by Mademoiselle Josse. She fastened her playfellows' dresses together behind, she filled the school mistress's snuff-box with ashes, and invented other tricks of annoyance. Twice Mademoiselle Josse put her to the door, and then took her back again, so as not to lose the six francs a month. Directly after the classes were over, Nana revenged herself for having been shut in by making a fearful noise under the porch and in the courtyard, where the ironers, whose ears could not stand her noise, had told her to play. There she would meet Pauline, the Boches' daughter, and Victor, the son of Gervaise's old employer—a big sheep of ten, who delighted in playing with very little girls. Madame Fauconnier, who had not quarrelled with the Coupeaus, used to send her son herself. In the house, too, there was an extraordinary swarm of brats—flights of children who rolled down the four staircases at all hours of the day, and alighted on the pavement of the courtyard like bands of noisy pillaging sparrows. Madame Gaudron would send down nine, both dark and fair, with tangled hair and dirty faces, breeches which almost went up to their eyes, stockings falling down over their shoes, and torn jackets which showed their white skin through the tears. Another woman, a baker's carrier on the fifth floor, contributed seven. Bands issued from every room. And, in this

multitude of rosy-faced children, who got a bath only when it rained, one would see tall ones looking like pieces of string, stout ones looking already like a man, and little ones but recently escaped from their cradles, still unsteady, quite silly, and going on all fours when they wanted to run.

Nana reigned supreme over this lot of urchins ; she played madame over girls twice her own size, and only condescended to relinquish a little of her power to Pauline and Victor, intimate confidants who enforced her commands.

Things had not gone on very pleasantly between the Boches and the Coupeaus for a month past. Gervaise, who was very kind naturally, was continually bestowing bottles of wine, plates of broth, oranges, and slices of cake on her neighbours. One night she had taken the remains of an endive and beetroot salad to the doorkeeper's room, knowing that Madame Boche would have stooped to any meanness to obtain it. But on the morrow she became quite pale with rage on hearing Mademoiselle Remanjou relate how Madame Boche had thrown the salad away in the presence of several persons, with an air of disgust, and under the pretext that she, thank Heaven ! was not yet reduced to being fed on things which others had knocked about. And from that moment, Gervaise stopped short all the presents ; no more bottles of wine, no more cups of broth, no more oranges, no more slices of cake—nothing.

It was worth anything to see the faces that the Boches made. It seemed to them like a robbery of which the Coupeaus had been guilty. Gervaise then saw her mistake ; for, if she had not been so stupid as to stuff them so much, they would not have got into bad habits, and would have remained quite polite. Now, the doorkeeper said the worst things that would hang together about her. At the October quarter, she treated M. Marescot, the landlord, to endless slanderous stories, because the laundress, who spent her savings in gormandising, was a day

behind with her rent ; and even M. Marescot, who was not very polished, entered the shop with his hat on his head, and demanded his money, which was, however, handed to him at once. Naturally, the Boches had become friendly again with the Lorilleux. Now, it was the Lorilleux who, in the midst of the emotions of their reconciliation, tipped with the Boches in their room. They would never have quarrelled had it not been for that Hobbler, who would even have made mountains fight. Ah ! the Boches know her well now ; they could understand how much the Lorilleux must suffer. And whenever she passed beneath the doorway, they all affected to sneer at her.

One day, however, Gervaise went up to see the Lorilleux. It was in regard to mother Coupeau, who was then sixty-seven years old. Mother Coupeau's eyesight was almost gone. Her legs, too, scarcely bore her weight. She had been obliged to give up her last place, and now threatened to die of hunger if she were not helped. Gervaise thought it shameful that a woman of that age, having three children, should be thus abandoned by heaven and earth. And as Coupeau refused to speak to the Lorilleux himself, saying that she, Gervaise, could very well go and do so herself, she went up in a fit of indignation, with which her heart was bursting.

Having gone up, she entered the door like a tempest, and without knocking. Nothing had been changed since the night when the Lorilleux for the first time had received her so coldly. The same strip of faded woollen stuff separated the room from the workshop,—a lodging like a gun barrel, and which looked as if it had been built for an eel. At the back, Lorilleux, leaning over his bench, was fastening together, one by one, the links of a piece of chain, whilst Madame Lorilleux, standing before the vice, was passing a gold wire through the draw-plate. In the broad daylight the little forge had a rosy reflection.

"Yes, it's I," said Gervaise. "It surprises you to see me, as we're not very good friends. But I've come

neither for you nor for myself, you may be very certain. It's for mother Coupeau that I've come. Yes, I have come to see if we're going to let her beg her bread from the charity of others."

"Ah, well, that's a fine break in upon people!" murmured Madame Lorilleux. "One must have a face of brass for that."

And she turned her back and resumed drawing her gold wire, affecting to ignore her sister-in-law's presence. But Lorilleux raised his face, and cried,—

"What's that you say?" Then, as he heard perfectly well, he went on,— "More pinchbeck, eh? She's nice, mother Coupeau is to go and cry starvation everywhere! Why, only the day before yesterday she dined here. We do what we can. We haven't got Peru. But if she goes about gossiping with others, she had better stay with them, for we don't like spies."

He took up the piece of chain, and turned his back to Gervaise also, adding as though with regret,—

"When everybody else gives five francs a month we'll give five francs."

Gervaise had calmed down, and felt quite chilled by the stony-looking faces of the Lorilleux. She had never once gone into their rooms without experiencing a certain uneasiness. With her eyes fixed on the ground, on the holes of the wooden grating, through which the waste gold fell, she now explained herself in a reasonable manner. Mother Coupeau had three children; if each one gave five francs, it would only make fifteen francs, and really that was not enough: one could not live on a sum like that; they must at least triple it among them.

But Lorilleux cried out at this. Where did she think he could steal fifteen francs a month?

People were so strange; they all thought he was rich, simply because he had gold in his shop. Then, he abused mother Coupeau: she would not give up her coffee in the morning, she would have her drop of brandy, she required no end of things, like one who had a fortune.

Good gracious! everyone liked to take things easy; but yet, was it not so? when one had not troubled to save a single sou, one must do as others did—tighten their stomachs a little. Besides, mother Coupeau was not so old as to be unable to work; she could still manage to see very well when she wanted to get a tit-bit from the bottom of the dish; in fact, she was an artful old woman, who wanted to be pampered up. Even had he had the means, he would have thought it wrong to support anyone in idleness.

Gervaise, however, remained conciliatory, and peaceably argued against all these bad arguments. She tried to soften the Lorilleux. But the husband ended by no longer answering her. The wife was now before the forge, scouring the piece of chain in the little brass saucepan with a long handle, full of lye-water. She still affected to turn her back, as though a hundred leagues off. But Gervaise spoke on still, watching them pretending to be absorbed in their labour, in the midst of the black dust of the workshop, their bodies distorted, their clothes patched and greasy, both become stupidly hardened, like old tools in their narrow mechanical task. Then, suddenly anger again rose in her throat, and she exclaimed,—

“Very well, I’d prefer that; keep your money! I shall take mother Coupeau, do you hear? I sheltered a cat the other evening, so I can at least do the same for your mother. And she shall want nothing, she shall have her coffee and her drop of brandy! Good heavens! what a vile family.”

Madame Lorilleux at this blow turned round. She brandished the saucepan as though she was about to throw the lye-water in her sister-in-law’s face. She stammered angrily,—

“Be off, or I shall do you an injury! And don’t count on the five francs, because I won’t give a radish! no, not a radish! Ah well! yes five francs! Mamma would be your servant, and you would gormandise with

my five francs! If she goes to live with you, tell her this, she may die, but I won't even send her a glass of water. Now, off you go! rid this room of yourself at once!"

"What a monster of a woman!" said Gervaise, violently slamming the door behind her.

The next day, she took mother Coupeau to live with her. She put up her bedstead in the big closet where Nana slept, which got its light from a little round window close to the ceiling. The moving did not take long, for all the furniture mother Coupeau possessed consisted of this bedstead, an old walnut wardrobe which was placed in the dirty clothes room, a table and two chairs; they sold the table and had the chairs re-cained. And the old woman, on the very evening of her arrival, used her broom a little, and washed up the dinner things, in fact made herself useful, feeling delighted at having got out of her troubles. The Lorilleux were bursting with rage, the more so as Madame Lerat had just become friendly again with the Coupeaus.

Three years passed by. There were frequent quarrels and reconciliations. Gervaise did not care a button for the Lorilleux, the Boches, and all the others who did not think like herself. If they were not pleased, they could do the other thing. She earned what she wished, that was her principal concern. The people of the neighbourhood had ended by greatly esteeming her, for the fact was, one did not find many customers so good, paying punctually, never shuffling or higgling. She bought her bread of Madame Coudeloup, in the Rue des Poissonniers; her meat of stout Charles, a butcher in the Rue Polonceau; her grocery at Lehongre's, in the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or, almost opposite her own shop. Francois, the wine merchant at the corner of the street, supplied her with wine in baskets of fifty bottles. Her neighbour Vigouroux, sold coke to her at the same figure as the gas company.

And, it is right to say that her tradespeople served her

faithfully, knowing that there was everything to gain from her by treating her well. So, whenever she went about the neighbourhood, bareheaded and in her slippers, she received "good-days" on all sides; she was always quite at home, the neighbouring streets were like the natural dependencies of her lodging, which opened on a level with the pavement. She would now linger over her shopping, happy in being out of doors in the midst of her acquaintances.

CHAPTER VI.

ONE afternoon in the autumn, Gervaise, who returned from taking some washing home to a customer in the Rue des Portes-Blanches, found herself at the bottom of the Rue des Poissonniers just as the day was declining. It had rained in the morning, the weather was very mild, and an odour rose from the greasy pavement; and the laundress, burdened with her huge basket, breathed a little hard, making slow steps, and inclined to take her ease as she ascended the street with the vague preoccupation of a voluptuous desire increased by her weariness. She would have liked to have had something nice to eat. Then, on raising her eyes, she beheld the name of the Rue Marcadet, and she suddenly took an idea of going to see Goujet at his forge. Twenty times he had asked her to look in any day she was curious to see how iron was wrought. Besides, in presence of the other workmen, she would inquire for Etienne, and seem only to have called for the little fellow.

The manufactory of bolts and rivets was somewhere near there, at that end of the Rue Marcadet, though she did not exactly know where; more especially as the numbers were often missing, the whole length of the houses being interspersed by vacant plots of land. She could only remember that the factory was near an old iron and rag warehouse, a kind of sewer opening on a level with the ground, in which slumbered hundreds of thousands of francs' worth of goods, as Goujet used to say. And she tried to find her way amidst the noise of

the factories. Slender pipes on the roofs violently disgorged jets of steam ; at regular intervals, a grating sound, like that produced by calico being torn suddenly, issued from a sawmill ; button factories shook the ground with the rumbling and tic-tac of their machinery. As she was looking towards Montmartre, undecided, and not knowing whether she ought to go any further, a gust of wind blew the smoke from a tall chimney downward, and infected the streets. She closed her eyes, feeling almost suffocated, when she heard a cadenced noise of hammers ; without knowing it, she was exactly opposite the place she was in search of, and she recognised the fact on perceiving the hole full of rags beside her.

Yet she still hesitated, not knowing where to enter. She advanced carefully, moving in towards the light, when a workman, his face blackened with coal-dust, and wearing a goatee, passed near her, casting a side-glance from his pale eyes.

"Sir," she asked, "it's here, is it not, that a boy named Etienne works ? He's my son."

"Etienne, Etienne," repeated the workman, in a hoarse voice, as he twisted himself about. "Etienne ; no, I don't know him."

His open mouth exhaled that odour of alcohol which comes from old brandy casks when their bungs are taken out ; and, as the meeting with a woman in that shadowy corner was beginning to make him too friendly, Gervaise drew back murmuring,—

"But yet it's here that Monsieur Goujet works, isn't it ?"

"Ah ! Goujet, yes," said the workman ; "I know Goujet. If it's Goujet you've come for, go right to the end."

And, turning round, he called out at the top of his voice, which sounded like cracked brass,—

"I say, Golden-Jaws, here's a lady wants you !"

But a clanging of iron drowned the cry. Gervaise went to the end. She reached a door, and stretched out her neck. The door opened into a vast apartment, in

which at first she could distinguish nothing. The forge, as though dead, shone in a corner with the faint glimmer of a star, which rendered the darkness deeper still. Large shadows hung about; now and again black masses passed before the fire, hiding that last gleam of light, men disproportionately enlarged, whose sinewy limbs could be imagined. Gervaise, not daring to venture farther, called from the doorway, in a faint voice,—

“Monsieur Goujet! Monsieur Goujet!”

Suddenly all became lighted up. Beneath the puff of the bellows, a jet of white flame had ascended. The shed appeared, enclosed by boarding, with openings roughly plastered round, and corners strengthened by the help of brick walls. The dust that blew from the coal fire had coated the place with a greyish soot. Cobwebs hung from the beams, looking like rags put up, there to dry, and heavy with years of collected dust. Around the walls, on shelves, or hanging to nails, or thrown down in the dark corners, was a *pele-mele* of old iron, of damaged utensils, and of enormous tools, showing, as they lay about, their tarnished, harsh, and broken forms. And the bright white flame continued to blaze away, illuminating, as though with a ray of sunshine, the trodden ground, on which the shining steel of four anvils, fixed in their blocks, had a reflection of silver streaked with gold.

Then Gervaise recognised Goujet, in front of the forge, by his beautiful yellow beard. Etienne was blowing the bellows. Two other workmen were there, but she saw none save Goujet, and walked forward and stood before him.

“Hallo! Madame Gervaise!” he exclaimed, with a bright look on his face. “What a delightful surprise!”

But, as his comrades appeared to look tickled, he replied to their glances by pushing Etienne towards his mother, and resumed,—

“You’ve come to see the little chap. He behaves well: he’s beginning to get wrists now.”

"Ah, well!" said she, "it's not easy to come here. I thought myself at the end of the world."

And she related her journey. Then she asked him why Etienne's name was not known in the workshop. Goujet laughed and explained that everyone called the boy the little Zouzou, because he had his hair cut short like a zouave's. Whilst they were talking together, Etienne left off working the bellows, the flame of the forge gradually lowered, a rosy glimmer was dying away in the middle of the shed, now once more dark. The blacksmith, deeply touched, watched the smiling young woman, looking so fresh in that faint light. Then, wrapped in the shadows, as neither continued speaking, he seemed to recollect himself, and broke the silence.

"You will excuse me, Madame Gervaise, I've something that has to be finished. You'll stay there, won't you? You won't annoy anybody."

She remained. Etienne returned to the bellows. And Gervaise, feeling happy and interested in the commotion round the forge, did not think of leaving. She was making a considerable compass to get nearer to Etienne without having her hands burnt, when she saw the dirty and bearded workman, whom she had spoken to outside, enter.

"So you've found him, madame?" he asked, in his drunken, bantering manner. "You know, Golden-Jaws, it's I who told madame where to find you."

He was called Salted-Mouth, otherwise Drink-without-Thirst, the brick of bricks, a crack hand at bolt forging, who wetted his iron every day with a bottle of brandy. He had gone out to have a drop, because he felt he wanted greasing to keep up till six o'clock. When he learnt that Zouzou was really called Etienne, he thought it very funny, and he showed his black teeth as he laughed. Then he recognised Gervaise. Just the day before he had had a glass of wine with Coupeau. You could speak to Coupeau about Salted-Mouth, otherwise Drink-without-Thirst; he would at once say,—“He's a

first-class fellow !” Ah, that animal Coupeau ! he was one of the right sort ; he stood “ sam ” oftener than his turn.

“ I’m awfully glad to know you’re his wife,” he added. “ He deserves to have a pretty wife. Eh, Golden-Jaws ! Madame is a fine woman, isn’t she ? ”

He was becoming quite gallant, pushing nearer the laundress, who took hold of her basket and held it in front of her, so as to keep him at a distance.

The morning of Gervaise’s visit to the forge happened to be the last Saturday in the month. When she reached the Goujets, where she made a point of going herself, her basket had so weighed on her arms that she was quite two minutes before she could get her breath. One would hardly believe how heavily clothes weigh, especially when there are sheets among them.

“ You’ve brought everything ? ” asked Madame Goujet.

She was very particular on that point. She insisted on having her washing brought home without a single article being missing, to keep good order, as she said. Another of her requirements was that the laundress should always come on the day arranged, and at the same hour ; in that way there was no time lost.

“ Oh ! yes, there’s everything,” replied Gervaise, smiling. “ You know I never keep anything back.”

“ That’s true,” Madame Goujet confessed ; “ you’ve fallen into some bad habits, but you’ve not got that one yet.”

And, whilst the laundress emptied her basket, laying the linen on the bed, the old woman praised her : she never burnt the articles nor tore them, as so many others did, neither did she pull the buttons off with the iron ; only she used too much blue, and made the shirt fronts too stiff with starch.

“ Just look, it’s like cardboard,” she continued, making a front crackle between her fingers. “ My son does not complain, but these cut his neck. To-morrow it will be all scratched when we return from Vincennes.”

“ No, don’t say that ! ” exclaimed Gervaise, very vexed.

"To look nice, shirts must be rather stiff, otherwise it's as though one had a rag on one's body. Look at real gentlemen ! I do all your things myself. A workwoman never touches them, and I assure you I take great pains—I would, if necessary, do everything over ten times—because it's for you, you know."

She slightly blushed as she stammered out the last words. She was afraid of letting her see the great pleasure she took in ironing Goujet's shirts herself.

"Oh ! I'm not speaking against your work ; you work to perfection," said Madame Goujet. "For instance, you've done this cap splendidly, only you could bring out the embroidery like that. And the goffering is all so even ! Come now ! I recognise your hand in that at once. When you give even a dish-cloth to a workwoman I detect it. In future, use a little less starch, that's all ! Goujet does not care to have the air of a gentleman."

"Then, she took up the book and ticked off the items with a pen. Everything was correct. When they made up the account, she saw that Gervaise had charged her six sous for a cap ; she protested against this, but she was obliged to admit that it was not dear among the other things ; no, shirts five sous, pillow cases a sou and a half, aprons a sou each ; no, it was really not dear, for many laundresses charged two liards, and even a sou more for all those articles. Then, when Gervaise had called over the soiled linen, which the old woman wrote down, she pushed it into the basket ; but instead of taking her leave, she remained there with an embarrassed manner, and with a request on her lips, which she could scarcely bring out.

"Madame Goujet," said she at length, "if it does not put you about, I should like the money for this month's washing just now."

It so happened that that month was a very heavy one, the account they had made up together amounted indeed to ten francs seven sous. Madame Goujet looked at her a moment in a serious manner, then she replied.—

"My child, it shall be as you wish. I won't refuse you the money, as you need it. Only, it's scarcely the way to pay off your debt; I say that for your own sake you know. You should be careful."

Gervaise received her lecture with a bowed head, and stammering answers. The ten francs were to make up the amount of a bill she had given her coke merchant. But on hearing the word "bill," Madame Goujet became severer still. She gave herself as an example: she had reduced her own rate of living, ever since Goujet's wages had been lowered from twelve to nine francs a day. When one was wanting in wisdom whilst young, one died of hunger in one's old age. Yet, she restrained herself; she did not tell Gervaise that she merely gave her the washing to do to enable her to pay off her debt. Before this later time she had washed all her things herself, and she would do so again if the washing was going to take sums like that out of her pocket. When Gervaise had got the ten francs seven sous, she returned thanks and went off quickly. And, outside on the landing, she felt relieved; she was inclined to dance, for she was already becoming accustomed to the worries and unpleasantnesses of money matters, keeping of such vexations only the delight of being free of them, until the next time.

It was on that very Saturday that Gervaise met with a rather strange adventure as she descended the Goujet's staircase. She was obliged to stand up close against the balusters with her basket, to make way for a tall bare-headed woman who was coming up, carrying in her hand a very fresh mackerel, with its gills all bloody, in a piece of paper. And then she recognised Virginie, the girl with whom she had fought at the wash-house. They looked each other full in the eyes. Gervaise shut hers, for she thought for a moment that she was going to receive the mackerel in her face. But no, Virginie even smiled slightly. Then, as her basket was quite blocking up the staircase, the laundress wished to show herself polite.

"I beg your pardon," she said.

"You are already excused," replied the tall brunette.

And they remained conversing together on the staircase, reconciled at once without having ventured on a single allusion to the past. Virginie, then twenty-nine years old, had become a superb woman, of good style, her face, however, looking rather long between her two bands of jet black hair. She at once began to relate her history just to boast. She had a husband now; she had married in the spring an ex-journeyman cabinetmaker, who had recently left the army, and who had applied to be admitted into the police, because as a post it is more to be depended upon and more genteel. So, she had been out to buy the mackerel for him.

"He adores mackerel," she explained. "We must spoil them, those naughty men, mustn't we? But do come up. You shall see our home. We are standing in a draught here."

• When Gervaise, after having told in her turn the story of her own marriage, said that she had lived in the same lodging, where she had been confined of a daughter Virginie pressed her to come up more earnestly than ever. It is always a pleasure to see the places again where one has been happy. For five years past she had been residing in the Gros-Caillou district, on the other side of the water. It was there that she had first known her husband, who was then in the service. But she was dull; she was anxious to return to the neighbourhood of the Goutte-d'Or, where she knew everybody; and for the last fortnight she had been living in the lodgings facing the Goujets. Oh, all her things were still in great disorder; they would get arranged little by little.

Then they at length told each other their names on the landing.

"Madame Coupeau."

"Madame Poisson."

And from the time, they called each other whenever they met Madame Poisson and Madame Coupeau, solely for the pleasure of being madame, they who in former

days had been acquainted when occupying more questionable positions. However, Gervaise felt a little mistrust at heart. Perhaps the tall brunette had become apparently reconciled the better to avenge herself for the beating at the wash-house, by concocting some plan worthy of a spiteful, hypocritical wretch. Gervaise determined to be on her guard. For the present, as Virginie behaved so nicely, she would be nice also.

In the room upstairs, Poisson, the husband, a man of thirty-five, with a cadaverous-looking countenance and carrotty moustaches and imperial, was seated working at a table near the window. He was busy making little boxes. His tools were only a penknife, a saw about the size of a finger-nail file, and a pot of glue. The wood which he used came from old cigar-boxes, thin strips of unpolished mahogany, which he cut up into pieces, and embellished with extraordinary delicacy. All day long, from one end of the year to the other, he made the same kind of box, three inches by two and a quarter. Only he checkered them, invented different shapes for the lids, and divided them into compartments. It amused him, and was a way of killing time whilst awaiting his appointment in the police. From his old trade of cabinetmaking he had only preserved a passion for constructing little boxes. He did not sell his work, he distributed it in presents to his acquaintances.

Poisson rose from his seat and politely bowed to Gervaise, whom his wife introduced to him as one of her old friends. But he was no talker; he at once began to work again with his little saw. From time to time he only threw a glance in the direction of the mackerel placed on the corner of the chest of drawers. At length, at the end of a good half-hour, the laundress took her leave. Poisson scarcely turned round. Virginie, who escorted her out of the room, promised to return her visit; besides, she arranged to give Gervaise her custom; and as she detained her on the landing, Gervaise fancied that she wished to speak to her of Lantier, and of her

sister Adele, the burnisher. She felt quite put about in consequence. But not a word was exchanged respecting unpleasant things; they parted, wishing each other good-bye in a very amiable manner.

“Good-bye, Madame Coupeau.”

“Good-bye, Madame Poisson.”

That was the starting-point of a great friendship. Eight days later, Virginie never passed Gervaise's shop without going in; and she remained there gossiping for two or three hours together, to such an extent, indeed, that Poisson, filled with anxiety, fearing she had been run over, would come to seek her, with his expressionless and death-like countenance. Gervaise, seeing the dressmaker in this way every day of her life, soon became pre-occupied by the one idea. She could never hear her commence a sentence without thinking she was going to talk about Lantier; her thoughts went back to Lantier in spite of herself all the time the other remained with her. It was as stupid as possible, for she really did not care a pin for either Lantier or Adele, nor for what had become of them; she never asked a question: in fact, she did not feel the least curiosity to have news of them. But it seized upon her, notwithstanding her obstinate wish to the contrary. The thought of them continued in her head just the same as some refrain will come up continually to one's tongue, and which one cannot get rid of. She did not bear Virginie any ill-will, for it was certainly not her own fault. She enjoyed her company very much, and would detain her a dozen times before letting her go.

Meanwhile, winter had come, the fourth winter the Coupeaus had passed in the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. That year December and January were particularly cold. It froze as hard as a stone. After New Year's Day, the snow remained three weeks in the street without melting. It did not interfere with work, but the contrary, for winter is the best season for the ironers. It was very pleasant inside the shop. There was never any ice on the

window-panes like there was at the grocer's and the hosier's opposite. The stove, crammed full of coke, maintained a heat like that of a bath-room : the clothes steamed away, one could have thought oneself in the height of summer ; and one felt so comfortable with the door shut, being warm all over, so warm that one could have fallen asleep with one's eyes open. Gervaise laughingly said that she imagined herself in the country. The neighbours, wrapped up in snow, seemed to have their backs up ; and Gervaise was only able to exchange a nod with the charcoal-dealer near by, who walked about with her head bare, and with her mouth grinning from ear to ear, ever since the frost had become so severe.

What was peculiarly enjoyable in this dog-weather was to take some nice hot coffee in the middle of the day. The workwomen had no cause for complaint. The mistress made it very strong, and with not as much as four grains of chicory. It was quite different from Madame Faconnier's coffee, which was like ditch-water. Only, whenever mother Coupeau undertook to pass the water over the berry, it was always an interminable time before it was ready, because she would fall asleep over the kettle. When this happened, and the workwomen had finished their lunch, they would do a little ironing whilst waiting for the coffee.

It so happened that on the morning of Twelfth-day, half-past twelve struck, and still the coffee was not ready. It seemed to be determined not to pass through the strainer. Mother Coupeau tapped against the pot with a teaspoon ; then placed five glasses on a corner of the work-table that was free. The women now left their work. The mistress always poured out the coffee herself, after putting two lumps of sugar into each glass. It was the moment looked forward to all day.

On this afternoon, as each one took her glass and squatted down on a little stool in front of the stove, the shop-door opened. Virginie entered shivering all over.

"Ah, my children," said she, "it cuts you in two! I can no longer feel my ears. How beastly cold it is!"

"Ah, it's Madame Poisson!" exclaimed Gervaise. "Well, now, you've come at a proper moment. You must take some coffee with us."

"On my word, I can't say no. One feels the frost in one's bones merely by crossing the street."

There was still some coffee left, fortunately. Mother Coupeau went and fetched a sixth glass, and Gervaise let Virginie sugar her own coffee, out of politeness. The workwomen drew on one side, and made a little space near the stove for the new comer. She shivered for a moment, her nose quite red, and held her hands, stiff with cold, round her glass to warm them. She had come from the grocer's, where one froze whilst waiting for a quarter of a pound of Gruyere cheese. And she exclaimed about the great heat of the shop. Really, it was like entering an oven, it was enough to raise the dead, it filled one's whole body with such a pleasant sensation. Then, having recovered, she stretched out her long legs. And all the six slowly sipped their coffee in the midst of the interrupted work, in the damp sultriness caused by the steaming clothes. Only mother Coupeau and Virginie were seated on chairs; the others, on their little stools, looked as though they were on the floor; and that squint-eyed Augustine had even seized upon a portion of the sheet under the petticoat, so as to sprawl upon it. No one spoke at first; all kept their noses in their glasses, drinking their coffee.

"It's not bad after all," declared Clemence.

But she was seized with a fit of coughing, and almost choked. She leant her head against the wall to cough more vigorously.

"That's a bad cough you've got," said Virginie. "Wherever did you catch it?"

"One never knows!" replied Clemence, wiping her face with her sleeve. "It must have been the other evening. There were two who were trying to skin each other out-

side the 'Grand Balcony.' I wanted to see, so I stood there amidst the falling snow. Ah, what a licking that was! it was enough to make one die with laughing. One had her nose smashed; the blood streamed on the ground. When the other, a great long stick like me, saw the blood, she went off double quick time. And that night I began to cough badly."

"Pretty conduct that," murmured Madame Putois. "You're killing yourself, my girl."

"And if it amuses me to kill myself? Life isn't so very funny. Slaving all the blessed day long to earn fifty-five sous, roasting one's blood from morning to night in front of a stove; no, you know I've had enough of it. But, anyhow, this cough won't do me the service of carrying me off. It'll go off the same way it came."

Then Gervaise told Augustine to take the washing home to a friend of Madame Lerat's at Batignolles. Whilst speaking, her mistress put the basket on her arm and pushed her towards the door. The squint-eyed one, surly and sobbing, went off dragging her feet along in the snow.

Virginie, who remained dreamy, with her glass of coffee in her hand, said in a very low tone,—

"My goodness! one fights, and then kisses afterwards; one always gets on when one's good-hearted."

And, leaning towards Gervaise, she added with a smile,—

"No, truly, I bear you no ill-will. I refer to the wash-house matter; you recollect it?"

The laundress felt very much annoyed. That was what she had been fearing. She guessed that the other was about to ask her of Lantier and speak about Adele. The stove roared, an increase of heat issued from the red-hot pipe. In this general drowsiness the workwomen, who made their coffee last a long while so as to return to their work at the latest possible moment, watched the snow in the street with greedy and languishing looks. They were all in a confidential frame of mind; they

declared what they would have done if they had possessed ten thousand francs a year; they would simply have done nothing at all, they would have remained like that all day long warming themselves. Virginie had drawn nearer to Gervaise, so as not to be overheard by the others. And Gervaise felt herself a mean coward, no doubt because of the too great heat, and so feeble and limp, that she could not find strength to turn the conversation; she was even inclined to hear what the tall brunette had to say, her heart filled with an emotion which she enjoyed without confessing it.

"I hope I'm not giving you the least pain," resumed the dressmaker. "Already it's been twenty times on the tip of my tongue to say this. However, as we've got on to the subject at last, it's better to talk it over, isn't it? Ah! certainly not, I don't bear you any ill-will for what took place. On my word of honour! I have kept up no grudge for it."

She turned the remains of her coffee in her glass, so as to get all the sugar, and then drank three drops, with a slight hissing sound with her lips. Gervaise, with a swelling in her throat, still waited, and she asked herself if Virginie had really forgiven her the thrashing as she pretended she had; for she noticed some yellow sparks glimmering in her black eyes. That tall she-devil had perhaps only put her rancour into her pocket with her handkerchief over it.

"It was quite excusable on your part" she continued. "You had just been treated in a shameful and abominable manner. Oh, I can be just, you know. Had it been me, I'd have taken a knife."

She drank another three drops of her coffee, with the same noise at the edge of the glass. And she dropped her drawling tone of voice, and added quickly, without once stopping,—

"And it didn't bring them luck either; ah! good God! no, the very reverse. They went to live, the devil knows where, somewhere by La Glaciere, in a dirty

street where there's always mud up to your knees. Two days afterwards, I went off in the morning to lunch with them ; it was quite a journey in the omnibus, I can tell you. Well, my dear, I found them already wrangling together. Really, as I entered the room they were lifting their hands to each other. 'There's lovers for you ! You know that Adele isn't worth the rope to hang her. She's my sister, but that doesn't prevent my saying that she's in the skin of a thorough bad lot. She's treated me abominably ; it's too long to tell, besides there are some things still to be settled between us. As for Lantier ! well, you know him, he isn't worth much either. A little gentlemen, who whips you for a 'yes' or a 'no !' is it not so ? And he has a hard fist when he strikes. So they fought with each other fearfully. Whenever one went up the stairs one could hear them hitting away. One day, even the police came in. Lantier wanted an oil soup, something abominable that they eat in the south ; and as Adele said it was filthy, they threw the bottle of oil, the sauce-pan, soup-tureen, in fact, everything at each other ; to be brief, there was a scene that upset the whole neighbourhood."

Virginie related other awful quarrels that had taken place. She was inexhaustible in her stories ; she knew things that would make one's hair stand on end. Gervaise listened to the long story without uttering a word ; her face was very pale, and a nervous wrinkle hovered about the corners of her mouth, resembling a faint smile. It was nearly seven years since she had heard anyone speak of Lantier. She would never have believed that Lantier's name, murmured thus in her ear, could have caused such a burning sensation in the pit of her stomach. No, she never imagined she had such a curiosity to know what had become of the wretch who had treated her so shamefully. She could not be jealous of Adele now ; but she laughed inwardly all the same at the rows between the couple. She could fancy she saw the girl's body covered with bruises, and it avenged her and amused her. So she

could have stayed there till the morning came, listening to Virginie's reports. She asked no questions, because she would not appear to be interested to that extent. It was as though someone had abruptly filled up a great gap for her; at that moment, her past came very close on to her present.

Virginie ended by burying her nose in her glass; she sucked up the sugar, half closing her eyes meanwhile. Then Gervaise, understanding that she ought to say something, assumed an air of indifference, and asked,—

“Are they still living at La Glaciere?”

“Oh, no!” replied the other; “haven't I told you about that? For the last week they've been living separately. One fine morning Adele went off with her traps, and Lantier didn't run after her, I can assure you.”

The laundress let a faint cry escape her, and said out loud,—

“They're no longer living together!”

“Who aren't?” asked tall Clemence, interrupting her conversation with mother Coupeau and Madame Putois.

“Oh! nobody,” said Virginie. “Some people you don't know.”

She watched Gervaise, however, and noticed that she looked strangely moved. She drew nearer, and seemed to find a wicked pleasure in resuming her stories. Then all at once she asked her what she would do if Lantier were to come hovering about her; for after all, men are so queer, and Lantier was quite capable of returning to his first love. Gervaise drew herself up, and spoke very clearly and in a very dignified manner. She was married, she would send Lantier right off, that was all. There could never henceforth be anything between them, not even a shake of the hands. She would really be utterly wanting in heart if she ever looked that man in the face.

“I know very well,” said she, “that Etienne is his child, there is a tie there that I cannot break. If Lantier should wish to kiss Etienne, I would send Etienne to

him, because it is impossible to prevent a father from loving his child. But as for myself, look you, Madame Poisson, I would let myself be hacked into little morsels before I would allow him to touch me with his little finger. That's all over."

As she uttered these last words, she made the sign of the cross in the air, as though to seal her oath for ever. And, desirous to break off the conversation, she seemed to rouse herself up with a start, and called to the workwomen,—

"I say, you people, do you think the clothes will iron themselves? What lazy creatures! Houp-la! to work."

The workwomen did not hurry themselves; they were benumbed by a fit of laziness; their arms were lying idly on their laps, whilst with one hand they still held their glasses, in which nothing but the dregs of the coffee remained. They continued talking,

"It was little Celestine," Clemence was saying. "I know her. She was mad about cat's hairs. You know she saw the cat's hairs everywhere round about her; she was always turning her tongue about like this because she thought her mouth was full of them."

Gervaise herself had again glided into a happy idleness. But she shook herself and rose to her feet. Ah, well! there was an afternoon wasted in nothing but talk. That would not fill the purse. She returned first of all to her curtains, but she found them stained with coffee, and before beginning her ironing again she was obliged to rub the stain with a damp rag. The workwomen stretched themselves before the stove, and surlily looked for their iron-holders. The moment Clemence moved, she was seized with another fit of coughing, making her almost spit out her tongue; then she finished her shirt, and pinned the collar and cuffs. Madame Putois had returned to her petticoat.

"Well, good-bye," said Virginie. "I only came out to get a quarter of a pound of Gruyere cheese. Poisson will be thinking that I've got frozen on the way."

But when she had gone a few steps along the pavement, she opened the door once more to say that she saw Augustine at the end of the street, sliding over the ice with some urchins. It was a good two hours since the young monkey had started on her errand. She came running up, quite red in the face, and all out of breath, with her basket on her arm, and her chignon plastered over with a snowball; and she submitted to their scolding with a sly look, excusing herself by saying that it was almost impossible to walk because of the frost. Some little vagabond had probably stuffed some bits of ice into her pockets for a lark, for at the end of a quarter of an hour the latter commenced watering the shop like two funnels.

At that time of the year all the afternoons were passed in the same way. The shop was the refuge of all the people of the neighbourhood who felt the extreme cold. Everyone in the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or knew that it was warm there. It was constantly full of jawing women, who enjoyed the heat from the stove as they stood in front of it with their skirts tucked up to their knees, making what is called "the little chapel." Gervaise took a certain pride in that pleasant warmth, and she attracted the people there and held receptions, as the Lorilleux and Boches spitefully declared. Old Bru, one of her neighbours, with his stooping body, his white beard, and his face as wrinkled as an old apple, would remain there for hours without uttering a word, listening to the chirping of the burning coke. Perhaps he was recalling his fifty years of work on ladders, the half century spent in painting doors and white-washing ceilings in all quarters of Paris.

"Well, father Bru," the laundress would sometimes ask, "what are you thinking of?"

"Nothing in particular—all sorts of things," he would reply, with a stupefied air.

The workwomen made fun of him, saying that he was in love. But he, without hearing them, relapsed into silence, and resumed his mournful and reflective attitude.

From that afternoon Virginie often spoke to Gervaise of Lantier. She seemed to find pleasure in filling her mind with ideas of her old lover, just for the sake of embarrassing her by making suggestions. One day she told her that she had met him ; then, as the laundress remained silent, she added nothing, and it was only on the morrow that she added he had spoken about her for a long time, and with great affection. Gervaise was much troubled by these reports, whispered in a corner of the shop. The mention of Lantier's name always caused a burning sensation at her heart. She certainly thought herself strong ; she wished to live like a virtuous woman, because virtue is the half of happiness. So she never considered Coupeau in this matter, having nothing to reproach herself with as to her husband, not even in thought. But with a hesitating and suffering heart, she would think of the blacksmith. It seemed to her that the memory of Lantier—that slow possession by which she was being enslaved—rendered her unfaithful to Goujet, to their unavowed love, sweet as friendship. She passed sad days whenever she felt herself culpable towards her good friend. She would have liked to have had no affection for anyone but him, outside of her family. It was a feeling far above all improper thoughts, the signs of which upon her burning face Virginie was always watching.

As soon as spring came, Gervaise went to seek refuge beside Goujet. She could no longer sit thinking of nothing on a chair without immediately remembering her first lover ; she imagined him leaving Adele, packing his clothes in the bottom of their old trunk, and returning to her with the trunk outside a cab. The days when she went out, she was seized with the most absurd fears in the street ; she was ever thinking she heard Lantier's footsteps behind her. She did not dare turn round, but trembled, and fancied she felt his hands seizing her round the waist. He was, no doubt, acting the spy upon her ; he would appear before her one afternoon ; and the very idea threw her into a cold perspiration, because he would to a certainty kiss

her on the ear as he used to do in former days, just to annoy her.

What a happy time ! The laundress took particular pains with the washing of her customer in the Rue des Portes-Blanches ; she always carried the clothes home herself, because that errand every Friday presented a ready excuse for passing through the Rue Marcadet, and visiting the forge. The moment she turned the corner of the street, she felt light and gay, as though, in the midst of those plots of waste land surrounded by grey factories, she were out in the country ; the roadway black with coal-dust, the feathering of steam over the roofs amused her as much as a moss-covered path leading through masses of green foliage in a wood in the suburbs ; and she loved the dull horizon, broken by the tall factory chimneys, the Montmartre summit, which hid the heavens from view, the chalky white houses pierced by the uniform openings of their windows. At the further end the forge shone with a brilliant light, even at mid-day. Her heart leapt with the dance of the hammers. When she entered, her face turned quite red, the little fair hairs at the nape of her neck flew about like those of a woman arriving at a lover's rendezvous. Goujet was expecting her, his arms and chest were bare, hammering harder on the anvil on those special days so as to make himself heard at a distance. He divined her presence, and greeted her with a good silent laugh in his yellow beard. But she would not let him break off his work ; she begged him to take up his hammer again, because she loved him the more when he wielded it with his big arms swollen with muscles. She would go and give Etienne a tap on the cheek, as he hung on to the bellows, and she would remain there for an hour, watching the rivets.

The two did not exchange ten words. The chuckles of Salted-Mouth, *alias* Drink-without-Thirst, did not annoy them much, for they no longer even heard them. At the end of a quarter of an hour she would begin to feel slightly oppressed ; the heat, the powerful smell, the ascend-

ing smoke, made her giddy, whilst the dull thuds of the hammers shook her from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet. But she desired nothing more, it was her pleasure. When, on the Fridays, the laundress parted from Golden-Jaws, she slowly reascended the Rue des Poissonniers, contented and tired, her mind and her body both at peace.

Little by little, her fear of Lantier diminished ; she became sensible. At that time she would still have led a very happy life, had it not been for Coupeau, who was decidedly going to the bad. One day she just happened to be returning from the forge, when she thought she recognised Coupeau inside old Colombe's Assommoir, in the act of treating himself to some goes of "vitriol," in company of Mes-Bottes, Bibi-the-Smoker, and Salted-Mouth, *alias* Drink-without-Thirst. She passed quickly by, so as not to seem to be spying on them. But she went back a little ; it was indeed Coupeau who was tossing his little glass of bad brandy down his gullet with a gesture already familiar. He lied then ; so he went in for brandy now ! She returned home in despair ; all her old dread of brandy took possession of her. She forgave the wine, because wine nourishes the workman ; all spirituous drinks, on the contrary, were filth, poisons which destroyed in the workman the taste for bread. Ah ! the government ought to prevent the manufacture of such swinish stuff !

On arriving at the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or, she found the whole house in commotion. Her workwomen had left the shop, and were in the courtyard looking up above. She questioned Clemence.

"It's old Bijard who's giving his wife a licking," replied the ironer. "He was under the doorway, as drunk as a dragoon, watching for her return from the wash-house. He beat her upstairs, with blows, and now he's making an end of her up there in their room. Listen, can't you hear her shrieks ?"

Gervaise went up in haste. She felt some friendship for her washerwoman, Madame Bijard, who was a woman

of considerable courage. She hoped to put a stop to the row. Upstairs, on the sixth floor, the door of the room was wide open, some lodgers were shou'ng on the landing, whilst Madame Boche, standing before the door, was calling out,—

“Will you stop that? I shall send for the police; do do you hear?”

No one dared to risk himself inside the room, because it was known that Bijard was like a brute-beast when he was drunk. Indeed he was scarcely ever sober. The rare days on which he worked, he placed a bottle of brandy beside his locksmith's vice, gulping some of it down every half-hour. He could not keep himself wound up any other way. He would have blazed away like a torch if anyone had put a lighted match close to his mouth. .

“But we mustn't allow her to be murdered!” said Ger-vaise, all trembling.

She entered. The room, an attic, and very clean, was bare and cold, almost emptied by the drunken habits of the man, who took the very sheets from the bed and drank them. During the struggle, the table had rolled away to the window, the two chairs, knocked over, had fallen with their feet in the air. In the middle of the room, on the tiled floor, lay Madame Bijard, all bloody, her skirts, still soaked with the water of the wash-house, clinging to her thighs, her hair torn from her head. She was breathing heavily, with a rattle in her throat, as she muttered prolonged ohs! each time she received a blow from the heel of Bijard's boot. He had knocked her down with his fists, and now he was jumping upon her.

“Ah! you villainous wretch! ah, you thing of evil!” grunted he, in a choking voice, accompanying each blow with each word, taking a delight in repeating them, and striking all the more cruelly the more he found his voice grew weaker.

Then, when he had lost all voice, he continued to kick with a dull sound in a mad fashion, rigid in his blue blouse and overalls, his face growing purple beneath his dirty

beard, and his bald forehead streaked with big red blotches. The neighbours on the landing said that he was beating her because she had refused him twenty sous that morning. Boche's voice was heard at the foot of the staircase. He was calling Madame Boche, and cried out,—

“Come down; let them kill one another, it'll be so much ‘canaille’ the less.”

Meanwhile, father Bru had followed Gervaise into the room. Between them, they were trying to bring the locksmith to reason, and were pushing him towards the door. But he turned round, speechless, with a foam on his lips, and in his pale eyes the alcohol was blazing with a murderous glare. The laundress had her wrist injured; the old workman was knocked over on to the table. Oh the floor, Madame Bijard was breathing with greater difficulty, her mouth wide open, her eyelids closed. Now, Bijard kept missing her. He had returned to the attack, but, blinded by rage, his blows fell on either side, and at times he was deceived by kicks which he sent into space. And, during all this butchery, Gervaise beheld in a corner of the room little Lalie, then four years old, watching her father finishing off her mother. The child held in her arms, as if to protect her, her sister Henriette, who had just been weaned. She was standing up, her head covered with a cotton cap, her face very pale and her air grave. Her large black eyes gazed with a fixedness full of thought, and were without a tear.

When at length Bijard, encountering a chair, stumbled on to the tiled floor, where they left him snoring, father Bru helped Gervaise to raise up Madame Bijard. The latter was now sobbing bitterly; and Lalie, drawing near, watched her crying, being used to such sights, and already resigned to them. As the laundress descended the stairs in the silence of the now quieted house, she kept seeing before her that look of this child of four, as grave and courageous as that of a woman.

CHAPTER VII

GERVAISE'S *fete* day fell on the 19th of June. On such festivals the Coupeaus always made "the little plates big ones"; they caroused till they were as round as balls, their stomachs filled for the rest of the week. There was a perfect clearance of all the money they had. Whenever they had a few pence in the house, they devoured them. They invented saints whose names were not in the almanac, just for the sake of giving themselves a pretext for gormandising. Virginie highly commended Gervaise for stuffing herself with all sorts of savoury dishes. When one has a husband who drinks all he can lay hands on, it's good to line one's stomach well, isn't it? and not to let everything go off in liquids. As the money was bound to go, it might just as well go to the butcher as to the publican. And Gervaise, a *gourmande* by nature, abandoned herself to that excuse. So much the worse! It was Coupeau's fault if they no longer even saved a red liard. She had grown fatter still, she limped more, because her leg, swollen with fat, seemed to become shorter at the same time.

That year they talked about her saint's day a good month before it came. They thought of dishes, and smacked their lips over the prospect. All the shop had a great longing to feast. They wanted a merry-making up to the hilt—something out of the common, and successful. Gracious heavens! one does not have so many opportunities for enjoyment. What most troubled the laundress was to decide who to invite; she wished to

have twelve persons at table, no more, no less. She, her husband, mother Coupeau, and Madame Lerat, already made four members of the family. She would also ask the Goujets and the Poissons. Originally, she had decided not to invite her workwomen, Madame Putois and Clemence, so as not to make them too familiar; but as the intended feast was being constantly referred to in their presence, and their noses scented the good things spoken of, she ended by telling them too to come. Four and four, eight, and two make ten. Then wishing particularly to have twelve, she became reconciled with the Lorilleux, who for some time past had been coming round her again; at least, it was agreed that the Lorilleux should come to dinner, and that peace should be renewed glass in hand. One certainly cannot remain for ever on ill terms with one's relations. Moreover, the thought of the anniversary would soften all hearts. It was an opportunity not to be allowed to slip. Only, when the Boches heard of the projected reconciliation, they at once went to Gervaise, with a great show of politeness, and most obliging smiles, and it became necessary to beg them also to join the party. Thus, they would be fourteen, without reckoning the children. Never before had she given such a dinner: she felt quite scared, while glorying in the prospect.

The saint's day happened to fall on Monday. It was fortunate. Gervaise counted on the Sunday afternoon to begin the cooking. On the Saturday, whilst the workwomen hastened with their work, there was a long discussion in the shop with the view of finally deciding upon what the feast should consist of. For three weeks past one thing alone had been fixed on—a fat roast goose. There was a gormandising look on every face at the very mention of it. The goose was even already bought. Mother Coupeau went and fetched it to let Clemence and Madame Putois feel its weight. And they uttered all kinds of exclamations; it looked such an enormous bird, with its rough skin all swelled out with yellow fat.

"Before that, there will be the pot-au-feu, won't there?" said Gervaise, "the soup and just a small morsel of the boiled beef; it's always good. Then we must have a plate of stew."

Tall Clemence suggested rabbit, but they were always eating that, everyone was sick of it. Gervaise wanted something more elegant. Madame Putois having spoken of stewed veal, they looked at one another with a smile which expanded approvingly. It was a splendid idea; nothing would look better than a veal stew.

"And after that," resumed Gervaise "we must have some other dish with a sauce."

Mother Coupeau proposed fish. But the others made a grimace, as they brought down their irons with a bang. None of them liked fish, it did not keep the stomach; and, besides that, it was full of bones. Squint-eyed Augustine having dared to observe that she liked skate, Clemence shut her mouth for her with a good cuff. At length, the mistress thought of stewed pig's back and potatoes, which brought back the smiles to every countenance, when Virginie entered like a puff of wind, her face quite brightened up.

"You come just in the nick of time!" exclaimed Gervaise. "Mamma Coupeau, just show her the bird."

And mother Coupeau went a second time and fetched the goose, which Virginie had to take into her hands. She uttered a whole series of exclamations. Goodness gracious! it was heavy. But she laid it down almost immediately on the work table, between a petticoat and a bundle of skirts. Her thoughts were elsewhere. She dragged Gervaise into the back room.

"I say, my little friend," murmured she, rapidly. "I've come to warn you. You'll never guess whom I just met at the corner of the street. Lantier, my dear! He's hovering about on the watch; so I ran here at once. It frightened me, for your sake, you know."

The laundress became quite pale. What could the wretched man want with her? Coming, too, like that,

just in the midst of the preparations for the feast. She had never had any good fortune ; she could not even be allowed to enjoy herself quietly. But Virginie replied that she was very stupid to put herself out about it like that. Why ! if Lantier dared to follow her about, all she had to do was to call a policeman, and have him locked up. For a month past, ever since her husband had obtained his appointment in the police force, the tall brunette had assumed most cavalier ways, and was always talking of having people arrested. As she raised her voice whilst she uttered the wish that someone might touch her in the street, to give her the opportunity of dragging the scoundrel to the station-house and handing him over to Poisson, Gervaise, by a sign, begged her to stop her talk, because the workwomen were listening. The laundress returned the first to the shop, and resumed with a great affectation of calmness,—

“After that there must be a vegetable.”

“What, green peas with a little fat bacon, what do you say ?” asked Virginie. “That’s what I could eat.”

“Yes, yes ; green peas and bacon !” approved all the others, whilst Augustine enthusiastically made the poker jump in the stove.

At length the Monday arrived. Now that Gervaise was going to have fourteen persons at table, she became afraid that she would not be able to find room for them all. She decided that the covers should be laid in the shop ; and the first thing in the morning, she took measurements so as to settle which way she should place the table. After that, they had to remove all the clothes, and take the ironing-table to pieces ; the top of this laid on to some shorter trestles was to serve as the dining-table. But, just in the midst of all this moving, a customer appeared and made a scene because she had been waiting for her washing ever since Friday ; they were making game of her, she would have her things at once. Then Gervaise tried to excuse herself and lied boldly ; it was not her fault, she was cleaning out her

shop, the workwomen would only return on the morrow; and she pacified her customer and got rid of her by promising to busy herself with her washing at the earliest possible moment.

The entire morning was employed in completing the purchases. Three times Gervaise went out and returned laden like a mule. But, just as she was going to order the wine, she noticed that she had not enough money left. She could easily have got it on credit; only, the house could not be without money on account of the thousand little expenses that one is apt to forget. And Mother Coupeau and she lamented together in the back room, as they reckoned that they required at least twenty francs. Where should they find them, those four pieces of a hundred sous each? Mother Coupeau, who had at one time done the charring for a little chorus girl of the Batignolles Theatre, was the first to suggest the pawnshop. Gervaise laughed with relief. How stupid she was not to have thought of it before. She quickly folded her black silk dress up in a towel, which she pinned together. Then she hid the bundle under mother Coupeau's apron, telling her to keep it very flat against her stomach, on account of the neighbours, who had no need to know; and she went to watch at the door, to see that the old woman was not followed. But the latter had only gone as far as the charcoal-dealer's when she recalled her.

"Mamma! mamma!"

She made her return to the shop, and having taken her wedding-ring from her finger, said,—

"Here put this with it. We shall get the more."

And when Mother Coupeau brought her twenty-five francs, she danced for joy. She would order an extra six bottles of wine, sealed wine to drink with the roast. The Lorilleux would be crushed.

For a fortnight past this idea as to the Lorilleux had had been the Coupeaus' dream. Was it not the case that those sly ones, the man and his wife—a pretty pair indeed—shut themselves up whenever they had anything nice to

eat, as though they had stolen it? Yes, they covered up the window with a blanket to hide the light, and make believe that they were in bed. Naturally, that prevented people going up and calling on them; and they gormandised all alone, they hastened to stuff themselves without uttering a word aloud. Even the next morning they were too cunning to throw the remains on the dust-heap, because one would have known then what they had had to eat; Madame Lorilleux went to the end of the street and threw them down a sewer opening; one morning Gervaise had caught her there emptying a basketful of oyster shells. Ah! no, it certainly was the case that those skinflints were not bad to themselves, and all these dodges were followed out through their passion for wishing to appear poor. Well, one would give them a lesson, and show them that one was not shabby. Gervaise would have laid her table across the street had she been able to, so that she could have invited each passer-by. Money was not invented that it should be allowed to grow mouldy, was it? It looks pretty when it shines all new in the sunshine.

Mother Coupeau and Gervaise talked of the Lorilleux, whilst they laid the cloth, from three o'clock. They had hung some big curtains at the windows; but, as it was warm, the door was left open, and the whole street passed in front of the table. The two women did not place a decanter, or a bottle, or a salt-celler, without trying to arrange them in such a way as to give vexation to the Lorilleux. They had arranged their seats so as to give them a full view of the cloth superbly laid, and they had reserved the best crockery for them, well knowing that the porcelain plates would produce a great effect.

"No, no, mamma," cried Gervaise! "don't give them those napkins; I have just two of damask."

"Ah, well!" murmured the old woman; "they will be killed by this, that's certain."

And they smiled to each other, as they stood on either side of that big white table, on which the fourteen

covers, placed all round, caused them to swell with pride. It had the appearance of the altar of some chapel in the middle of the shop.

"Yes, that's because they're so shabby themselves," resumed Gervaise. "You know they lied last month, when the woman said everywhere that she had lost a piece of gold chain as she was taking the work home. True! As if she ever lost anything. It was simply a way of doing the miserable, and of not giving you your five francs."

"As yet, I've only seen my five francs twice," said mother Coupeau.

"You may say so, next month they'd invent some other story. That explains why they cover their window up when they have a rabbit to eat. Doesn't it, now? One would have the right to say to them:—'As you can eat a rabbit, you can certainly give five francs to your mother.' Oh! they're full of vice! What would have become of you if I hadn't taken you to live with us?"

Mother Coupeau moved her head backwards and forwards. That day she was all against the Lorilleux, because of the great feast the Coupeaus were giving. She loved cooking, the little gossipings round the saucepans, the house turned upside down by the fun of saints' days. Besides, she generally got on pretty well with Gervaise. On other days, when they badgered one another, as happens in all families, the old woman grumbled and said it was wretchedly unfortunate for her to be thus at her daughter-in-law's mercy. At heart, she probably had some affection for Madame Lorilleux; after all, she was her daughter.

"Ah!" continued Gervaise, "you wouldn't be so fat, would you, if you were living with them? And no coffee, no snuff, no little luxuries. Tell me, would they have given you two mattresses on your bed?"

"No, that's very certain," replied mother Coupeau. "When they arrive I shall place myself so as to have a good view of the door, to see them screw their noses."

Towards five o'clock the guests began to arrive. First of all came the two workwomen, Clemence and Madame Putois, both in their Sunday best, the former in blue, the latter in black; Clemence wore a geranium, Madame Putois a heliotrope; and Gervaise, whose hands were just then smothered with flour, had to kiss each of them on both cheeks, her arms thrust behind her back. Then, close upon her heels, entered Virginie, dressed like a lady, in a printed muslin costume with a sash and a bonnet, though she had only a few steps to come. She brought with her a pot of red carnations. She took the laundress in her big arms and squeezed her tight. And next, Boche came forward with a pot of pansies, and Madame Boche with a pot of mignonette; then came Madame Lerat with a balm-mint, the pot of which had dirtied her violet merino dress. All these people kissed each other, and gathered together in the back room in the midst of the three stoves and the roasting machine, which gave out a suffocating heat. The noise from the saucepans drowned the voices. A dress catching in the oven caused quite an emotion. The smell of roast goose was so powerful that it made their mouths water. And Gervaise was very pleasant, thanking everyone for their flowers, without, however, letting that interfere with her preparing the thickening for the stewed veal at the bottom of a soup plate. She had placed the pots in the shop at one end of the table without removing the bands of white paper that were round them. A sweet perfume of flowers mingled with the odour from the kitchen.

"Do you want any help?" asked Virginie. "When I think you've been three days preparing all this feast, how strange that it should all be swallowed up in no time."

"Well! you know," replied Gervaise, "it wouldn't get ready itself. No, don't dirty your hands. You see, everything's prepared. There's only the soup to attend to."

Then they all set themselves at their ease. The ladies laid their shawls and their caps on the bed, and pinned up their skirts, so as not to soil them. Boche,

who had sent his wife back to look after the house until dinner-time, was already pushing Clemence up into a corner, near the stove, and asking her if she was ticklish; and Clemence panted and wiggled about, doubling herself up, her breasts almost bursting her corsage, for the bare idea of being tickled made her quiver. The other ladies also came into the shop, so as not to be in the way of the cooks, and stood up against the wall, looking at the table; but, as the conversation continued through the open door, and they could not hear each other, they returned back from time to time and abruptly invaded the room with their loud voices, surrounding Gervaise, who forgot what she was doing to answer them, with her steaming spoon in her hand. Oh! the hostess could make herself easy; they would clear it all off so thoroughly that she would have no need to wash up the crockery on the morrow. The guests seemed to get up their appetites by sniffing around the saucepans and the oven. The ladies ended by behaving like little girls; they played at pushing one another about, they ran from one apartment to the other, shaking the floor, stirring up and developing the odours of the cooking with their skirts, amidst a deafening uproar, in which their laughter mingled with the noise of mother Coupeau's chopping knife as she minced the bacon.

Just as they were all jumping about and shouting and making fun, Goujet appeared! He was so timid he scarcely dared enter, but stood still, holding a tall white-rose tree in his arms, a magnificent plant, with a stem that reached to his face and entangled the flowers in his yellow beard. Gervaise ran to him, her cheeks burning from the heat of the stoves. But he did not know how to get rid of his pot; and, when she had taken it from his hands, he stammered, not daring to kiss her. It was she who was obliged to stand on tip-toe, and place her cheek against his lips; he was so agitated that, even then, he kissed her roughly on the eye, almost blinding her. They both stood trembling.

"Oh! Monsieur Goujet, it's too lovely!" said she, placing the rose-tree beside the other flowers, which it overtopped with the whole of its tuft of foliage.

"Not at all, not at all," he repeated, unable to say anything else.

And, when he had sighed deeply, he slightly recovered himself, and then stated that she was not to count much upon his mother; she was suffering from sciatica. Gervaise was grieved; she talked of putting a piece of the goose aside, as she particularly wished Madame Goujet to taste the bird. However, they were waiting for no one else. Coupeau was no doubt knocking about in the neighbourhood with Poisson, whom he had called for just after lunch; they would be home immediately; they had promised to be back punctually at six. Then, as the soup was almost ready, Gervaise called to Madame Lerat, saying that she thought it was time to go and bring the Lorilleux. Madame Lerat became at once very grave; it was she who had conducted all the negotiations, and who had settled how everything should pass between the two families. She put her cap and shawl on again, and went upstairs quite stiffly in her skirts, and with an important air. Down below, the laundress continued to stir her vermicelli soup without saying a word. The guests suddenly became serious, and waited with solemnity.

It was Madame Lerat who appeared first. She had gone round by the street, so as to give more importance in the reconciliation. She held the shop-door wide open, whilst Madame Lorilleux, wearing a silk dress, stopped at the threshold. All the guests had risen, Gervaise went forward, and, kissing her sister-in-law, as had been agreed, said to her,—

"Come then, you're welcome! It's all over, isn't it? We'll both be as nice as possible."

And Madame Lorilleux replied,—

"I don't ask more than that it should be so always."

When she had entered, Lorilleux also stopped at the

threshold, and he likewise waited to be embraced before penetrating into the shop. Neither the one nor the other had brought a bouquet. They had determined on this, because they thought it would have too much the appearance of giving way to the Hobbler if they carried flowers with them the first time they went to her home. Gervaise called to Augustine to bring two bottles of wine. Then, filling some glasses on a corner of the table, she called all the guests to her. And each took a glass, and drank to the good friendship of the family. There was a pause while the guests were drinking, the ladies raising their elbows, and emptying their glasses to the last drop.

"Nothing is better before soup," declared Boche, with a smack of his tongue.

Mother Coupeau had placed herself opposite the door to see the faces of the Lorilleux. She pulled Gervaise by the skirt, and drew her into the back room. And as they both leant over the soup, they conversed rapidly, in a low voice.

"Eh! what a joke!" said the old woman. "You couldn't see them, but I was watching them. When she caught sight of the table, her face twisted round like that, the corners of her mouth nearly touched her eyes; and he, why, it nearly choked him, he began to cough so much. Now, just look at them over there; they've no saliva left in their mouths; they're biting their lips."

"It's quite painful to see people jealous to that extent," murmured Gervaise.

Really the Lorilleux had a queer expression on their faces. No one, of course, likes to be crushed, in families, above all, when some succeed, the others do not like it: it's only natural. Only, folk keep it in, and do not make an exhibition of themselves. Now, the Lorilleux could not keep it in. It was too much for them. They squinted—their mouths were all on one side. In short, they showed it so clearly, that the other guests looked at them, and asked them if they were indisposed. They would never be able to stomach the table, with its fourteen

knives and forks, its white table-cloth and napkins, and its slices of bread cut beforehand. One could have believed oneself in a restaurant on the Boulevards. Madame Lorilleux walked round, holding her nose down, so as not to see the flowers, and she slyly fingered the big tablecloth, tormented by the thought that it was a new one.

"Here we are then!" cried Gervaise, as she reappeared smiling, her arms bare, and her little fair curls blowing over her temples.

The guests were shuffling about round the table. All were hungry, and they gasped slightly, with a stupid air.

"If the good man would only come," resumed the laundress, "we might begin."

"Ah, well!" said Madame Lorilleux, "the soup has time to get cold. Coupeau always forgets. You shouldn't have let him get away!"

It was already half-past six. Everything was burning now: the goose would be done too much. Then Gervaise, feeling quite vexed, talked of sending someone to all the wine-shops in the neighbourhood to see if they could not find Coupeau. And, as Goujet offered to go, she decided to go with him. Virginie, anxious about her husband, went also. The three of them, bareheaded, quite blocked up the pavement. The blacksmith, who wore his frock coat, had Gervaise on his left arm and Virginie on his right: he was doing the two handled basket, as he said; and the expression seemed to them so funny that they stopped, not able to move their legs for laughing. They looked at themselves in the pork-butcher's glass, and laughed more still. People turned round to see them pass, looking so fresh and lively, dressed in their Sunday best on a week-day, and jostling the crowd which hung about the Rue des Poissonniers on that warm June evening. But it was not a question of enjoying themselves. They went right to the door of each wine-shop, looked in, and sought amongst the

people standing before the counter. Had that animal, Coupeau, gone to the Arc de Triomphe to get his dram? They had already done the upper part of the street, looking in at all the likely places; at the "Little Civet," renowned for its preserved plums; at old mother Bacquet's, who sold Orleans wine at eight sous; at the "Butterfly," the house of call for coachmen, gentlemen, who were not easy to please. But no Coupeau. Then as they were going down towards the Boulevard, Gervaise uttered a faint cry on passing before the eating-house, kept by Francois, at the corner.

"What's wrong now?" asked Goujet.

The laundress no longer laughed. She was very pale, and felt so great an emotion that she had almost fallen. Virginie understood it at once, as she caught sight of Lantier, seated at one of Francois's tables, quietly dining. The two women drew the blacksmith along.

"My foot twisted," said Gervaise, as soon as she could at last speak.

At length they discovered Coupeau and Poisson at the bottom of the street, inside father Colombe's Assommoir. They were standing up, in the midst of a lot of men; Coupeau, in a grey blouse, was shouting, with furious gestures, and banging his fists down on the counter. Poisson, who was not on duty that day, and buttoned up in an old brown coat, was listening to him in a dull sort of way, and without uttering a word, bristling his red moustache and imperial. Goujet left the edge of the pavement, and went and laid his hand on the zinc-worker's shoulder. But when the latter got a glance of Gervaise and Virginie outside, he grew angry. Why was he bothered with such females as those! Petticoats had begun to hunt him about now! Well! he declined to stir, they could go and eat their dirty dinners all by themselves. To appease him, Goujet was obliged to accept a drop of something; and even then Coupeau had the mischievousness to waste a good five minutes at the counter. When he at length came out, he said to his wife,—

"This doesn't suit me. I'm going to stay where I've business, do you hear?"

She did not answer. She was trembling from head to foot. She had probably been talking of Lantier with Virginie, for the latter pushed her husband and Goujet, telling them to walk on in front. Then the two women placed themselves on either side of the zinc-worker, so as to occupy him, and prevent him from seeing. He was only slightly tipsy, more excited with shouting than with drink. As they seemed to wish to go along the left-hand pavement, he jostled them and crossed over to the other side of the street, just for the sake of mischief. They ran after him in a great fright and tried to hide the view at Francois's door. But Coupeau must have known that Lantier was there. Gervaise almost went out of her senses on hearing him grunt,—

"Yes, my girl, there's a young chap of our acquaintance inside there! You mustn't take me for a flat! Don't let me catch you sauntering about again with your side glances!"

And he made use of some nasty expressions. It was not him that she had come to look for, with her bare elbows and her mouth all floury; it was her old sweetheart. Then he was suddenly seized with a mad rage against Lantier. One or the other of them would have to be left on the pavement, cleaned out like a rabbit. Lantier, however, did not appear to notice what was going on, and continued slowly eating some veal and sorrel. A crowd began to assemble. Virginie led Coupeau away, and he calmed down at once when he had turned the corner of the street. Consequently, they returned to the shop far less gaily than when they left it.

The guests were waiting round the table with very long faces. The zinc-worker shook hands with them, posing affectedly before the ladies. Gervaise, feeling rather dejected, spoke in a low tone, as she directed them to their seats. But she suddenly noticed that

Madame Goujet not having come, a seat would remain empty—the next one to Madame Lorilleux.

"We are thirteen!" said she, deeply affected, seeing in that a fresh proof of the misfortune with which she had felt herself menaced for some time past.

The ladies, already seated, rose up, looking anxious and vexed. Madame Putois offered to retire, because, according to her, it was no laughing matter; besides she would not eat a thing, the food would do her no good. As to Boche, he chuckled. He would sooner be thirteen than fourteen; the portions would be all the larger, that was sure enough.

"Stop!" said Gervaise. "I can arrange it."

And going out on to the pavement, she called father Bru, who was just then crossing the roadway. The old workman entered, stooping and stiff, and his face expressionless.

"Scat yourself there, my good fellow," said the landress. "You would like to dine with us wouldn't you?"

He simply nodded his head. He was willing; it was much the same to him whether he did or not.

"Ahem! as well him as another," continued she, lowering her voice. "He doesn't often eat all he can. He will, at least, enjoy himself once more. We shall feel no remorse in filling ourselves up now."

Goujet was so touched that the tears come to his eyes. The others pitied the old man, thought it a very good idea, adding that it would bring luck to them all. However, Madame Lorilleux did not seem pleased at being next to the old fellow; she drew away from him, casting uncomplimentary glances at his horny hands, and at his patched and stained blouse. Father Bru sat with bowed head embarrassed above all by the napkin which hid the plate before him. He ended by lifting it off, and placed it quietly on the edge of the table, without dreaming of putting it over his knees.

And then Gervaise served the vermicelli soup; the

guests were lifting up their spoons, when Virginie remarked that Coupeau had again disappeared. He had perhaps returned to father Colombe's. And the company was really annoyed. This time, so much the worse ! no one would run after him ; he could stay in the street if he was not hungry ; but as the spoons touched the bottom of the plates, Coupeau reappeared with two pots of flowers, one under each arm, a stock and a balsam. Everybody at the table clapped their hands. He gallantly placed his pots, one on the right, the other on the left of Gervaise's glass ; then, bending over and kissing her, he said,—

“ I had forgotten you, darling. But that doesn't prevent us loving each other all the same, on such a day as this.”

“ He's very nice this evening—Monsieur Coupeau,” murmured Clemence in Boche's ear. “ He's just got what he required, sufficient to make him amiable.”

The good man's behaviour restored the gaiety of the party, at one moment compromised. Gervaise, once more at her ease, was all smiles again. The guests finished their soup. Then the bottles circulated, and they drank their first glass of wine, just a few drops, pure, to wash down their vermicelli. One could hear the children quarrelling in the next room. There were Etienne, Pauline, Nana, and little Victor Fauconnier. It had been decided to lay a table for these four, and they had been told to be very good. That squint-eyed Augustine, who had to look after the stoves, was to eat off her knees.

“ Mamma ! mamma ! ” suddenly screamed Nana, “ Augustine is sopping her bread in the oven ! ”

The laundress hastened there and caught the squint-eyed one in the act of burning her throat, in the attempts to swallow quickly a slice of bread dipped in boiling goose fat. She slapped her because the young devil-possession called out that it was not true. After the boiled beef, when the stewed veal appeared, served in a salad-bowl,

as they had not got a dish large enough, the guests joined in a laugh.

"This is becoming serious," declared Poisson, who rarely spoke.

It was half past seven. They had shut the shop door, so as not to be spied upon by the whole neighbourhood; the little clockmaker opposite, more than anybody, was opening his eyes as big as saucers, and seemed to take the pieces from their mouths with such a gluttonous look, that it almost prevented them from eating. The curtains hung before the windows admitted a great white uniform light without a shadow, which bathed the whole table, with its symmetrical arrangement of knives and forks, and its pots of flowers enveloped in tall collars of white paper; and this pale fading light, this slowly approaching dusk, gave to the party quite an air of distinction. Virginie spoke out; she looked round the closed apartment hung with muslin, and declared it to be pretty. When a cart passed in the street, the glasses jingled on the table-sloth, and the ladies were obliged to shout out as loud as the men. But they did not talk much; they all behaved very respectably, and were very polite. Coupeau alone wore a blouse, because, as he said, one need not stand on ceremony with friends, and besides, the blouse was the workman's garb of honour. The ladies, laced up in their bodices, wore their hair in plaits greasy with pomatum, in which the daylight was reflected; whilst the gentlemen, sitting a good bit from the table, swelled out their chests and kept their elbows wide apart for fear of staining their coats.

"Mamma! mamma!" called out Nana suddenly, "Augustine's putting her fingers in my plate!"

"Don't bother me! give her a slap!" replied Gervaise, in the act of stuffing herself with green peas.

Nana was at the head of the children in the next room acting as the mistress of the house.

She had seated herself by the side of Victor, and had placed her brother Etienne next to little Pauline; and

they were playing at being two married couples out for a day's amusement. At first, Nana had helped her guests, very prettily, with the smiling manner of a grown-up person; but she had just yielded to her love for bacon, and had kept all the best pieces for herself. That squint-eyed Augustine, who was slyly hovering round the children, had profited by the incident to seize a handful of the bacon, under the pretext of dividing it properly. Nana, in a rage, bit her wrist.

"Ah! you know," murmured Augustine, "I shall tell your mother that after the veal you asked Victor to kiss you."

But all got into good order again as Gervaise and mother Coupeau went off for the goose. The guests at the big table were leaning back in their chairs taking breath. The men had unbuttoned their waistcoats, the ladies were wiping their faces with their napkins. The repast was, as one might say, interrupted; only one or two persons, as they could not keep their jaws still, continued to swallow large mouthfuls of bread, without being conscious that they were doing so. The others were waiting and allowing their food to settle. Night was slowly falling; a dirty, ashy grey light was gathering behind the curtains. When Augustine brought two lighted lamps and placed one at each end of the table, the general confusion became apparent in bright glare—the greasy forks and plates, the cloth stained with wine and covered with crumbs. A strong stifling odour was pervading the room. Certain warm fumes, however, attracted all the noses towards the kitchen.

"Can I give you a hand?" cried Virginie.

She left her chair and passed into the inner room. All the women followed her one by one. They surrounded the oven, and watched with profound interest Gervaise and mother Coupeau, who were trying to pull the bird out. Then a clamour arose, through which one could distinguish shrill voices and the joyful jumping of the children. And there was a triumphal entry. Gervaise

carried the goose, her arms stiff, her face perspiring and expanded in one broad silent laugh; the women walked behind her, laughing, in the same way; whilst Nana, right at the end, raised herself up to see, her eyes open to their full extent. When the goose, enormous and golden, streaming with gravy, was on the table, they did not attack it at once. It was a wonder, a respectful surprise, which for a moment silenced everybody. They drew one another's attention to it with winks and nods of the head.

"She didn't get fat by licking the walls, that bird!" said Boche.

Then they entered into details as to the bird. Gervaise stated the facts. It was the best she could find at the poulterer's in the Faubourg-Poissonniere; it weighed twelve pounds and a half in the scales at the charcoal-dealers; they had burnt nearly half a bushel of charcoal in cooking it, and it had given three basins full of dripping. Virginie interrupted her to boast that she had seen the bird raw. One could have eaten it as it was, she observed, for the skin was so soft and white, a blonde's skin it was, indeed. All the men laughed in a gluttonous manner which swelled their lips. Lorilleux and Madame Lorilleux, however, only bit theirs, nearly suffocating to see such a goose on the Hobbler's table.

"Well! but we can't eat it whole," the laundress ended by observing. "Who'll cut it up? No, no, not me! It's too big; it frightens me!"

Coupeau offered to carve. Good gracious! it was very simple. You caught hold of the limbs and pulled them off; the pieces were good all the same. But the others protested; they forcibly took possession of the large kitchen knife which the zinc-worker already held in his hand. Whenever he cut anything up he turned the dish into a regular cemetery. For a moment they waited for some gentleman to come forward. At length Madame Lerat said, in a most amiable voice,—

"Listen, it should be Monsieur Poisson; yes, Monsieur Poisson."

But, as the others did not appear to understand, she added, with a more flattering air still,—

"Why yes, of course, it should be Monsieur Poisson, who's accustomed to the use of arms."

And she passed the kitchen knife she held in her hand to the policeman. All the guests laughed with pleasure and approval. Poisson bowed his head with military stiffness, and moved the goose in front of him. His neighbours, Gervaise and Madame Boche, drew further off, so as to leave plenty of room for his elbows. He carved slowly, with wide gestures, and with his eyes fixed on the bird, as though to nail it to the bottom of the dish. Then he thrust the knife into the goose, which cracked.

A great silence ensued. Necks were stretched out and every eye followed the knife. Poisson was preparing a surprise. Suddenly he gave a last cut; the after part of the bird came off and stood up on end, its nose in the air: it was the bishop's mitre. Then admiration burst forth. None were so agreeable in company as retired soldiers. Meanwhile the gravy streamed out of the opening in the goose's hind-quarters, and Boche smacked his lips.

At this moment Clemence persistently repeated in the midst of the noise,—

"Monsieur Poisson, listen, Monsieur Poisson. You will save me the parson's nose, won't you?"

"My dear, the parson's nose is yours by right," said Madame Lerat, in her discreetly wicked way.

However, the goose was now cut up. The policeman, after letting the party admire the bishop's mitre for some minutes, laid the pieces down and arranged them round the dish. All was now quite ready to be served; but the ladies, who were unhooking their dresses, complained of the heat. Coupeau called out that they were at home, that he did not care in the smallest degree for the

neighbours, and he opened the street door wide. The feast continued in the midst of the rumbling of the vehicles and the jostlings of the passers-by on the pavements. Then, their jaws having had a rest, and another cavity being found in their stomachs, they resumed the dinner, and fell furiously on the goose.

Then ensued a famous battle of fork and knife; that is to say, not one of the party recollected ever having before run the risk of such feasting. Gervaise, looking enormous, her elbows on the table, ate great pieces of the breast, without uttering a word, for fear of losing a mouthful, and merely felt slightly ashamed and annoyed at exhibiting herself thus, as gluttonous as a cat, before Goujet. Goujet, however, was too busy filling himself up to notice that she was quite red with eating. Besides, in spite of her greediness, she remained so nice and good! She did not speak, but she troubled herself every minute to look after father Bru, and place some dainty bit on his plate. It was quite affecting to see this glutton take a piece of wing almost from her mouth to give it to the old fellow, who did not appear to be any judge, and who ate up everything with bowed head, and bored at having to swallow so much—he whose gizzard had lost the very taste of bread. The Lorilleux expended their rage on the roast; they ate enough to last them three days; they would have swallowed the dish, the table, the very shop, so as to ruin the Hobbler at one blow. All the ladies had wanted a piece of the breast. Madame Lerat, Madame Boche, Madame Putois, were all picking bones; whilst mother Coupeau, who adored the neck, was tearing off the flesh with her two last teeth. Virginie liked the skin, when it was sweetly browned, and the other guests gallantly passed their portion of skin to her; so much so, that Poisson looked at his wife severely, and bade her stop, because she had had enough as it was. Once already, she had been a fortnight in bed, with her body swollen out, through having eaten too much goose. But Coupeau got angry and helped Virginie to the upper

part of a leg, saying that, by Jove's thunder ! if she did not pick it, she was no woman. Had roast goose ever done harm to anybody ? On the contrary, it cured all diseases of the spleen. One could eat it without bread, like dessert. He could go on guzzling at it all night without being the least inconvenienced, and just to show off, he stuffed a whole drum-stick into his mouth. Meanwhile, Clemence had got to the end of her parson's nose, and was sucking it with her lips, and wriggling with laughter on her chair because Boche was whispering all sorts of funny things to her. Ah, goodness yes, there was a blow-out ; When one's doing it, he is doing it, you know ; and if one only has the chance now and then, one would be mighty stupid not to stuff oneself up to one's ears. Really, one could see their sides swell out by degrees. They were cracking in their skins, the gormandisers ! With their mouths open, their chins besmeared with grease, they had faces as red as a turkey cock.

And the wine, O my children ! it flowed round the table as water flows into the Seine. A regular stream, like when it has rained and the earth is thirsty. Coupeau poured it out from on high to see the red jet froth up ; and when a bottle was empty, he turned it upside down, and pressed the neck with the gesture known among women milking cows. Another nigger with his head cracked ! In a corner of the shop the heap of dead niggers increased, a cemetery of bottles on to which they threw all the refuse from the table. Madame Putois, having asked for water, the zinc-worker indignantly removed all the carafes. Did respectable people drink water ? And tumblerfuls of wine were tossed off ; you could hear the liquid shooting down their throats, with the noise of rain-water rushing into the sewers during a storm. It rained a sour wine ! a wine which at first had the taste of an old cask, but to which one soon got accustomed, to such an extent that it ended by having a flavour of nuts.

Ah, ye gods? in spite of what the Jesuits say, the juice of the grape is, all the same, a famous invention! The guests laughed and applauded; for, after all, the workmen could not have lived without wine. Papa Noah must have planted the vine for the zinc-workers, the tailors, and the blacksmiths. Wine cleansed and rested one from work, and put fire into the stomachs of sluggards. Then, when the jester played his jokes on you, well! the king was not your uncle, Paris belonged to you! With all that, the workman over-fatigued, penniless, despised by the citizen class, had not many occasions of gaiety, and it was shabby to reproach him for an occasional spree, which he took merely to get a glimpse of the rosy side of life! At that very moment, for instance, did they care a hang for the Emperor? A fig for the aristocrats! Coupeau sent all the world to the devil. He thought women were screamers; he slapped his pocket, in which three sous rattled, laughing as though he had been shovelling up five-franc pieces. Even Goujet, usually so sober, was getting sprung. Boche's eyes were becoming smaller; Lorilleux had a pale look in his; whilst Poisson was rolling glances more and more severe from off his bronzed veteran's face. They were already quite half seas over. And the ladies had their share of it too. Oh, as yet it was but slight, just a glimpse of the wine on their cheeks, with a desire to loosen their clothes, which caused them to remove their handkerchiefs. Clemence alone was beginning to forget herself. But suddenly Gervaise recollected the six sealed bottles of wine. She had forgotten to put them on the table with the goose; she fetched them, and all the glasses were filled. Then Poisson rose up, and, holding his glass in his hand, said,—

“I drink to the health of the lady of the house.”

All of them stood up, making a great noise with their chairs as they moved. Holding out their arms, they clinked glasses in the midst of quite an uproar.

"This day fifty years hence!" cried Virginie.

"No, no," replied Gervaise, much affected and smiling; "I shall be too old. Ah! a day comes when one's glad to go."

Meanwhile through the door, which was wide open, the neighbourhood was looking on, and was assisting in the festivities. Passers-by stopped in the broad ray of light which shone over the pavement, and laughed gaily at seeing all those people stuffing away so heartily. The coachmen, leaning forward on their seats, whipping up their sorry jades, glanced in and cracked a joke as they passed: "I say, aren't you going to stand something?" And the smell of the goose made the whole street joyful and smiling; the grocers' lads fancied they were eating the bird themselves as they stood on the pavement opposite; every minute the green-grocer and the tripe-dealer came to their shop doors, and sniffed the air as they licked their lips. Positively the street was bursting with indigestion. Mesdames Cudorge, mother and daughter, who kept the umbrella shop a few doors off, and as a rule, were never seen out of doors, crossed the road one behind the other, casting side-glances, and looking as red as though they had just been making pancakes. The little clockmaker, seated at his work-table, could no longer work, intoxicated with having counted the bottles of wine, and dreadfully excited in the midst of his merry little clocks.

Yes, the neighbours were fuming with rage and envy! Coupeau cried. But why should there be any concealment made about the matter? The party, now fairly launched, was no longer ashamed of showing itself at table; on the contrary, it felt flattered and excited at seeing the crowd gathered there, gaping with gluttonous looks; it would have liked to have knocked out the shop-front and dragged the table into the roadway, and there to have enjoyed the dessert under the very nose of the public, and amidst the hubbub of the thoroughfare. Nothing disgusting was to be seen in

them, was there? Then there was no necessity to shut themselves in like selfish people. Coupeau, noticing that the little clockmaker was looking so enviously and being so thirsty, held up a bottle, and, as the other accepted with his head, he carried him the bottle and a glass. A fraternity was established with the street. They drank to all those who passed. They called in any fellows who had the right cut. The feast spread, extending from one to another, to that degree that the entire neighbourhood of the Goutte-d'Or sniffed the provisions, and held its stomach, like a Bacchanalian party of all the devils. For some minutes Madame Vigouroux, the charcoal-dealer, had been passing to and fro before the door.

"Hi! Madame Vigouroux! Madame Vigouroux!" yelled the party.

She entered with a broad grin on her washed face, and so fat that the body of her dress was bursting. Boche made room for her beside him. But she being accustomed to that sort of thing, quietly emptied a glass of wine, and related that all the neighbours were at their windows, and that some of the people of the house had begun to be angry.

"Oh, that's our business," said Madame Boche. "We're the doorkeepers, aren't we? Well, we're answerable for good order. Let them come and complain to us; we'll receive them in a good fashion."

In the back room there had just been a furious fight between Nana and Augustine, on account of the oven, which both wanted to scrape out. For a quarter of an hour the oven had rebounded over the tiled floor with a noise like an old saucepan. Nana was now nursing little Victor, who had a bone of the goose in his throat. She pushed her fingers under his chin, and made him swallow big lumps of sugar by way of a cure. That did not prevent her keeping a watch on the large table. At every minute she came and asked for wine, bread or meat for Etienne and Pauline.

"Here! burst it!" her mother would say to her. "Perhaps you'll let me have peace now."

The children were scarcely able to swallow any longer, but they continued to gormandise all the same, banging their forks down on the table to the air of a canticle, in order to excite themselves.

In the midst of the noise, however, a conversation was engaged in between father Bru and mother Coupeau. The old fellow, who was ghastly pale in spite of the wine and the food, was talking of his sons who had died in the Crimea. Ah! if the lads had lived, he would have had bread to eat all his life. But mother Coupeau, her tongue a little thick, leaning towards, him, said,—

"Ah! one has many annoyances with children. For instance, I have the appearance of being happy here, don't I? Well, 'I cry more often than you think. No, don't wish to have children.'"

Father Bru shook his head.

"I can't get work anywhere," murmured he. "I'm too old. When I enter a workshop the young fellows joke, and ask me if it was I who polished Henri IV.'s boots. Last year, I was still able to make thirty sous a day at painting a bridge; I had to remain on my back all the time, with the river flowing beneath. I've coughed ever since then. To-day, it's all over; they won't have me anywhere."

He looked at his poor stiff hands, and added,—

"One can understand it; I'm no longer any good for anything. They're right; I should do the same as they do in the circumstances. You see, the misfortune is that I'm not dead. Yes, it's my fault. One should lie down and die when one's no longer able to work."

"Really," said Lorilleux, who was listening; "I don't understand why the Government doesn't come to the aid of the invalids of labour. I was reading that in a newspaper the other day."

But Poisson thought he was called on to defend the Government.

"Workmen are not soldiers," declared he. "The Invalides is for soldiers. You must not ask for what is impossible."

The dessert was now served.● The centre-piece was a Savoy cake in the form of a temple, with a dome fluted like a melon; and over this dome was placed an artificial rose, close to which was a silver-paper butterfly, fluttering at the end of a wire. Two drops of gum in the heart of a flower imitated two drops of dew. Then, to the left, a piece of cream cheese floated in a deep dish; whilst in another dish to the right, were piled up some large bruised strawberries, with the juice running from them. However, there was still some salad left, some large coss lettuce leaves soaked with oil.

"Come, Madame Boche," said Gervaise, coaxingly, "a little more salad. I know it's a passion of yours."

"No, no, thank you; I've already had quite enough," replied the doorkeeper.

● The laundress turning towards Virginie, the latter stuck her finger into her mouth, as though to touch the food she had swallowed.

"Really, I'm full," murmured she. "There's no room left. A mouthful wouldn't get in."

"Oh, but if you tried a little," resumed Gervaise, with a smile. "There is always a little corner left. One doesn't require to be hungry to be able to eat salad. You're surely not going to let this be wasted."

"You can eat it to-morrow pickled," said Madame Lerat; "it's nicer so."

The ladies puffed as they looked with an air of regret at the salad-bowl. Clemence told how she had one day devoured three bunches of water-cresses at her lunch. Madame Putoise could do no more than that; she would take some heads of lettuce, and munch them up with a little salt just as they were, without picking them in pieces. They could all have lived on salad, would have treated themselves to bucketfuls. And this talk helping, the ladies finished the salad.

"I could go on all fours in a meadow," observed the doorkeeper, with her mouth full

Then they smiled in view of the dessert. Dessert did not count. It came rather late, but that did not matter; they would nurse it all the same. Even were they to burst like bomb shells, they could not allow themselves to be made fools of by cake and strawberries. Besides, nothing was pressing them; they had plenty of time, all night if they pleased. Meanwhile, they filled their plates with cream cheese and strawberries. The men lit their pipes; and as the sealed bottles of wine were empty, they went back on the common wine, and drank it as they smoked. But every one desired that Gervaise should cut the Savoy cake at once. Poisson got up and took the rose, which he very gallantly presented to the lady of the house, amidst the applause of the whole party. She had to fix it with a pin to the left side of her dress, over her heart. At each movement, she made the butterfly flutter about.

"I say!" exclaimed Lorilleux, who had just made a discovery, "but it's your work-table that we're eating off. Ah, well! I daresay it's never seen so much work before."

This ill-natured joke had had a great success. Witty allusions came in showers. Clemence could not swallow a spoonful of strawberries without saying that there was another shirt ironed; Madame Lerat pretended that the cream cheese smelt of starch! whilst Madame Lorilleux said between her teeth that it was a fine idea to swallow up the money so quickly on the very boards on which one had had so much labour to earn it. A tempest of shouts and laughter followed.

But suddenly a loud voice called for general silence. It was Boche, who, standing up in an affected vulgarly strutting manner, was commencing to sing "The Volcano of Love, or the Seductive Trooper."

"'Tis I, Blavin, conqueror of the fair—"

A thunder of applause met the first verse. Yes, yes,

they would sing songs. Everyone would in turn. It was more amusing than anything else. And the guests all put their elbows on the table, or leant back in their chairs, nodding their heads at the best parts, and sipping their wine at the choruses. That rascal Boche had a special gift for comic songs. He would almost make the water-bottles laugh when he imitated the raw recruit, with his fingers apart, and his hat on the back of his head. Directly after "The Volcano of Love," he rolled out "The Baroness de Follebiche," one of his greatest successes. When he reached the third verse, he turned towards Clemence, and almost murmured in a slow and voluptuous tone of voice,—

"The baroness had people there,
Her sisters four, oh ! rare surprise !
Three were dark, and the last was fair !
Between them, eight bewitching eyes."

• Then the whole party, carried away, joined in the chorus. The men beat time with their heels, whilst the ladies with their knives against their glasses marked the cadences. All of them roared out,—

"Sapristi ! who will pay for this ?
A 'stand' to the pa—to the pa—pa—?
Sapristi ! who will pay for this ?
A 'stand' to the pa—to the pa—tro—o—l ?"

The panes of glass of the shop-front resounded, the great volume of breath from the singers agitated the muslin curtains. Whilst all this was going on, Virginie had already twice disappeared, and each time when she came back had leant towards Gervaise's ear to give her in a low tone a piece of information. When she returned the third time, in the midst of the uproar, she said to her,—

"My dear, he's still at Francois's; he's pretending to read the newspaper. He's certainly got some bad plan in his head."

She spoke of Lantier. It was him that she had been

watching. At each new report Gervaise became more and more grave.

"Is he drunk?" asked she of Virginie.

"No," replied the tall brunette. "He looks as though he had only got what he required. It's that above all which makes me anxious. Eh! why does he remain in the pub if he's had all he wanted? Good heavens! I hope nothing is going to happen."

The laundress, greatly upset, begged her to be quiet. A profound silence had suddenly followed the clamour. Madame Putois had just risen, and was about to sing "The Boarding of the Pirate." The guests, silent and thoughtful, watched her; even Poisson had laid his pipe down on the edge of the table, the better to listen to her. She stood up to the full height of her little figure, looking quite fierce, though her face looked quite pale beneath her black cap; she thrust out her left fist with a satisfied pride, as she thundered in a voice bigger than herself,—

"If any daring pirate
Should chase our gallant bark
We'll give him jolly fun,
And quarter he'll have none!
Let all hands man the guns,
And with rum fill each can!
While these pests of the seas
Dangle from the cross trees."

Yes, that was something serious. But, Sapristi! it gave one a fine idea of the thing itself. Poisson, who had been at sea, nodded in approval of the details. One could see too that that song was in accordance with Madame Putois' own feeling. Coupeau leant forward to tell how one night in the Rue Poulet, Madam Putois had boxed the ears of four men who had attempted to insult her.

Meanwhile, with the assistance of mother Coupeau, Gervaise was serving the coffee, though some of the

guests were still eating their Savoy cake. They would not let her sit down again, but cried out that it was her turn. With a pale face, and looking very ill at ease, she tried to excuse herself; indeed, some one inquired whether the goose had disagreed with her. Then she gave out, "Oh! let me slumber!" in a sweet and feeble voice. When she reached the chorus, that longing for a sleep filled with beautiful dreams, her eyelids closed a little, her rapt gaze lost itself in the darkness of the street. Directly afterwards, Poisson saluted the ladies with a nod of his head and commenced a drinking song, the "Wines of France," but he had a voice like a squirt; only the last verse, the patriotic one, met with any success, because when referring to the tri-colour flag, he raised his glass very high, balanced it a moment, and ended by pouring the contents into his open mouth.

Then a lot of ballads succeeded each other; Madame Boche's barcarolle was all about Venice and the gondoliers; Madame Lorilleux sang of Seville and the Andalusians in her bolero; whilst Lorilleux went so far as to allude to the perfumes of Arabia, in reference to the loves of Fatma, the dancer. Around the greasy table, in an atmosphere thickened with the breath of indigestion, horizons of gold opened, necks of ivory passed in sight, jet-black hair, kisses in the moonlight to the accompaniment of guitars, bayaderes scattering pearls and precious stones in their path; and the men blissfully smoked their pipes, the ladies smiled unconsciously with enjoyment; they all believed themselves there, breathing delicious odours. When Clemence went on to warble "Build a Nest," with a shake in the throat, this also caused a great deal of pleasure; for it recalled the country, the merry birds, the dances beneath the green foliage, the honey-dropping flowers—in short, all that one sees in the Bois de Vincennes on the days when one goes to ring the neck of a rabbit.

But Virginie renewed the joking with "My little Keg of Brandy;" she imitated the *vivandiere*, one hand on

her hip, the elbow bent, to indicate the little barrel; and with the other hand she poured out the brandy into space, by turning her fingers round. She did it so well that the party then begged mother Coupeau to sing "The Mouse." The old woman refused, swearing that she did not know the song. Yet, she started off with the remnants of her broken voice; and her wrinkled face, with its lively little eyes, underlined the allusions, the terrors of Mademoiselle Lise drawing her skirts around her at sight of a mouse. Everybody at the table laughed; the women could not keep their countenances, and continued casting bright looks at their neighbours; it was not bad after all, there were no coarse words in it. Then Goujet, on a sign from Gervaise, sang the "Farewell of Abd-el-Kader," which he thundered forth in his bass voice. It was very evident he had a solid wind! The words came from the midst of his beautiful yellow beard, as if from a brass trumpet. When he uttered the cry "O my noble companion!" alluding to the warrior's black mare, all hearts beat with him. He was applauded before coming to the end, for he had shouted so loud.

"Now, father Dru, it's your turn!" said mother Coupeau, "sing your song. The old ones are the best; come now!"

And everybody turned towards the old man, pressing him and encouraging him. He, almost stupefied with his immovable mask of tanned skin, looked at them all without appearing to understand. They asked him if he knew the "Five Vowels." He held down his head; he could not recall it; all the songs of the good old days were mixed up in his brain. As they made up their minds to leave him at peace, he seemed to remember, and began to stutter in a cavernous voice:

"Trou la la, trou la la,
Trou la, trou la, trou la la!"

His face became animated; this chorus seemed to

wake some far-off gaieties within him, which he enjoyed alone, as he listened with a childish delight to his voice as it became more and more hollow.

“Trou la la, trou la la,
Trou la, trou la, trou la la !”

“I say, my dear,” Virginie came and whispered in Gervaise’s ear, I’ve just been there again, you know. It annoyed me. Well ! Lantier has disappeared from Francois’s.”

“You didn’t meet him outside ?” asked the laundress.

“No, I walked quick, I didn’t want to look.”

But Virginie, who had raised her eyes, interrupted herself and heaved a smothered sigh.

“Ah ; good heavens ! He’s there, on the pavement opposite : he’s looking over here.”

Gervaise, quite beside herself, ventured to glance in that direction. Some persons had gathered together in the street to hear the party sing. The grocer’s men, the tripe-dealer, and the little clockmaker formed a group, looking as if they were at the theatre. There were some soldiers, some gentlemen in frocks-coats, and three little girls from five to six years old holding one another by the hand, looking very grave and lost in amazement. And Lantier was certainly there in the front row, listening, and coolly looking on. It was rare impudence, everything considered. Gervaise felt a chill ascend from her legs to her heart, and she no longer dared to move, whilst old Bru continued :

“Trou la la, trou la la,
Trou la, trou la, trou la la !”

“Ah, well ! no, my old friend, that’s enough !” said Coupeau. “Do you know the whole of it ? You shall sing it to us another day, eh ? when we’re too lively.”

This raised a laugh The old fellow stopped short,

glanced round the table with his pale eyes, and resumed his air of a meditative animal. The coffee had all been drunk and the zinc-worker had asked for more wine. Clemence had just gone back to the strawberries. For an instant, the songs ceased, they were talking of a woman who had been found hanged that morning in the house next door. It was now Madame Lerat's turn, but she required to prepare herself. She dipped the corner of her napkin into a glass of water and applied it to her temples, because she was too hot. Then, she asked for a "tear" of brandy, drank it, and slowly wiped her lips.

"The 'Child of the Good God,' shall it be?" she murmured, "the 'Child of the Good God.'"

And, tall and masculine-looking, with her bony nose and her shoulders as square as a gendarme's, she began :

"The lost child by its mother left,
Is sure of a home in Heaven above,
God sees and protects it on earth from His throne.
The child that is lost is the child of God's love."

Her voice trembled at certain words, and drew them out in liquid notes ; she looked out of the corner of her eyes to Heaven, whilst her right hand balanced itself before her chest or pressed against her heart, with an impressive movement. Then Gervaise, tortured by Lantier's presence, could not keep back her tears : it seemed to her that the song was relating her own sorrows, that she was the lost child, abandoned by its mother, and whom the good God was about to take under His protection. Clemence, who was very intoxicated, suddenly broke into sobs ; and, with her head fallen on the edge of the table, she stifled her hiccoughs with the cloth. A silence ensued that made one shudder. The ladies had produced their handkerchiefs, and were wiping their eyes without in the least turning away their faces, but thinking their emotion did them credit. The men,

their heads bent down, were looking straight before them, their eyelids blinking. Poisson, choking and grinding his teeth, broke two pieces off his pipe, one after the other, and spat the bits on to the ground, without ceasing to smoke. Boche, whose hand remained on the charcoal-dealer's knee, was seized with remorse and a vague respect, and no longer pinched her; whilst two big tears trickled down his cheeks. These revellers were as rigid as justice and as tender-hearted as lambs. The wine was coming out by the way of their eyes, that was the whole affair! When the chorus started again, slower and more pathetic, all gave way, all blubbered in their plates, bursting with sentimental emotions.

But Gervaise and Virginie could not, in spite of themselves, take their eyes off the pavement opposite. Madame Boche, in her turn, perceived Lantier, and uttered a faint cry, without ceasing to besmear her face with tears. Then, all three had very anxious faces as they exchanged involuntary signs of the head. Good heavens! if Coupeau were to turn round, if Coupeau were to see the other. What a slaying! what carnage! And they went on to such an extent, that the zincworker asked them,—

“Whatever are you looking at?”

He leant forward and recognised Lantier.

“Name of God! it's too much,” muttered he. “Ah! the dirty blackguard!—ah! the dirty blackguard! No, it's too much, it must come to an end.”

And, as he rose muttering most atrocious threats, Gervaise, in a low voice implored him to be quiet.

“Listen, I implore you,” she said. “Leave the knife alone. Remain where you are; don't do anything horrible.”

Virginie had to take the knife from him, which he had lifted from the table. But she could not prevent him leaving the party, and going up to Lantier. The guests, in their increasing emotion, saw nothing, but wept the more, whilst Madame Lerat sang with an excruciating expression,—

“ ‘Poor orphan girl, she has been lost,
And no one heard her voice,
But the giant trees as the branches tost
By the wind in ξ wild rejoice. ’ ”

The last line passed like a lamentable breath of the tempest. Madam Putois, who was about to drink, was so touched that she spilt her wine all over the tablecloth. Gervaise, meanwhile, remained like one frozen, her hand pressed against her mouth to prevent her from calling out, blinking her eyelids with fright, expecting every second to see one of the two men outside fall, struck down in the middle of the road. Virginie and Madam Boche, deeply interested, also followed the scene. Coupeau, surprised by the cool air, had almost squatted down in the gutter, on trying to rush upon Lantier. The latter, with his hands in his pockets, had simply moved on one side. And the two men were now miscalling each other, the zinc-worker, especially, was making use of some choice expressions. One could hear the enraged sound of their voices. One could distinguish the furious gestures they made, as though they were going to screw their arms off through striking many blows. Gervaise felt faint and shut her eyes, as the scene was lasting too long, and she expected every minute to see them biting each other's noses off, their faces were thrust so close together. Then, when she no longer heard anything, she opened her eyes again, and felt quite stupefied on seeing them quietly conversing together.

Madam Lerat's voice rose warbling and tearful, as she commenced another verse,—

“ ‘Next morn exhausted on the ground
The poor lost child half dead was found. ’ ”

“Some women are indeed brutes,” said Madam Lorilleuz, amidst general approbation.

Gervaise had exchanged a glance with Madam Boche and Virginie. Was it going to be arranged peaceably

then? Coupeau and Lantier continued to converse on the edge of the pavement. They were still addressing each other abusively, but in a friendly way. They called one another "damned scoundrel," but in a tone of voice which had a little affection in it. As people were looking on at them, they ended by walking gently on side by side past the houses, turning round again every ten steps. A very animated conversation was now taking place. Suddenly, Coupeau appeared to become angry afresh, whilst the other was refusing something and required to be pressed. And it was the zinc-worker who pushed Lantier along, and who forced him to cross the street and enter the shop.

"I tell you you're quite welcome!" shouted he. "You'll take a glass of wine, won't you? Men are men, are they not? We ought to understand one another."

Madam Lerat was finishing the last chorus. The ladies were singing all together, as they rolled up their handkerchiefs,—

"The infant that's lost is the good God's child!"

The singer was greatly praised, and she resumed her seat, affecting to be quite broken down. She asked for something to drink, because she always put too much feeling into that song, and she was constantly afraid of straining her nerves. Everyone at the table now had their eyes fixed on Lantier, who, quietly seated beside Coupeau, was gobbling up the last piece of Savoy cake, which he sopped in his glass of wine. With the exception of Virginie and Madame Boche, none of the guests knew him. The Lorilleux certainly scented some secret business, but not knowing what, they merely assumed their most conceited air. Goujet, who had noticed Gervaise's emotion, gave the newcomer a sour look. As an awkward pause ensued, Coupeau simply said,—

"This is a friend of mine."

And turning to his wife, added,—

“Come, shake yourself up! Perhaps there’s still some hot coffee left.”

Gervaise, feeling meek and stupid, gazed at them one after the other. At first, when her husband pushed her old lover into the shop, she buried her head in her hands, with the same instinctive gesture as she used on stormy days at each clap of thunder. She could not believe it possible; the walls would fall in and crush the whole of them. Then, seeing the two men seated together, without so much as the muslin curtains moving, she suddenly thought it the most natural thing in the world. The goose was disagreeing with her a little; she had certainly eaten too much of it, and this kept her from thinking. A happy feeling of languor benumbed her, retained her lolling at the edge of the table, with the sole desire of not being annoyed. Good heavens! what is the use of setting up one’s gall, when others do not, and when things arrange themselves to the general satisfaction? She got up to see if there was any coffee left.

In the back room the children had fallen asleep. That squint-eyed Augustine had tyrannised over them all during the dessert, taking their strawberries, and frightening them with most awful threats. Now she felt very ill, and was bent double upon a little stool, not uttering a word, her face ghastly white. Fat Pauline had let her head fall down against Etienne’s shoulder, and he himself was sleeping on the edge of the table. Nana was seated with Victor on the rug before the bed, she had passed her arm round his neck, and was drawing him towards her; and, succumbing to drowsiness her eyes shut, she kept repeating in a feeble voice,—

“O! mamma, I’m not well; oh! mamma, I’m not well.”

“No wonder,” murmured Augustine, whose head was

rolling about on her shoulders, "they're screwed; they've been singing like grown-up persons."

Gervaise received another blow as she caught sight of Etienne. She felt as though she would choke when she thought of the lad's father being there in the other room, eating cake, without even expressing a desire to kiss the little fellow. She was on the point of rousing Etienne, and of carrying him there in her arms. Then she felt, after a moment's thought, that the peaceable way in which matters had been arranged was the best. It would not have been proper to have disturbed the harmony of the end of the dinner. She returned with the coffee-pot and poured out a glass of coffee for Lantier, who did not appear to observe her.

"Now, it's my turn," shuttered Coupeau, in a thick voice. "Eh! you've been keeping me for the tit-bit. Well, I'll sing you 'What a Piggish Child.'"

"Yes, yes, 'What a Piggish Child!'" cried everyone.

The uproar was commencing again—Lantier was quite forgotten. The ladies prepared their glasses and their knives that they might knock an accompaniment to the chorus. They laughed beforehand, as they looked at the zinc-worker, who steadied himself on his legs as he put on his most vulgar air. Mimicking the hoarse voice of an old woman, he sang,—

"When out of bed each morn I hop,
I'm always precious queer,
I send him for a little drop
To th' drinking-ken that's near.
A good half-hour or more he'll stay,
And that makes me so riled,
He swigs it half upon his way:
What a piggish child!"

And the ladies, clinking their glasses, repeated in choir, in the midst of formidable gaiety,—

"What a pig of a child !
What a pig of a child !"

Even the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or itself joined in now. The whole district was singing "What a pig of a child !" Over the way, the little clockmaker, the grocer's men, the tripe-dealer, the greengrocer, who knew the song, took up the chorus, and gave one another smacks, just for a lark. Really, the street was ending by becoming intoxicated ; festive odour issuing from the Coupeaus' was alone sufficient to make everyone on the pavement as gay as if they were on a holiday. It is only true to say that the entire party inside was now exceedingly drunk. This had come on little by little from the first glass of pure wine after the soup. It was now the climax ; they were all braying and bursting with the food they had devoured, in the reddish haze of the two lamps, which required snuffing. The clamour of this gigantic booze perfectly drowned the rumbling noise of the last vehicles. Two policemen, thinking there was a riot, hastened to the spot ; but, catching sight of Poisson, they just nodded to him, and then slowly moved away, side by side, along the dark houses.

Coupeau was now singing this verse,—

"On Sundays at Petite Villette
Whene'er the weather's fine,
We call on uncle, old Tinette,
Who's in the dustman line ;
To feast upon some cherry stones
The young un's almost wild,
And rolls amongst the dust and bones.
What a pig of a child !
What a pig of a child !"

Then the house almost collapsed, such a roar went up in the calm, warm night air, that the shouters applauded themselves, for it was useless their hoping to be able to yell any louder.

Not one of the party could ever recollect exactly

now the carouse was brought to an end. It must have been very late, or very early, it's quite certain, for there was not a cat to be seen in the street. Possible, too, they had all danced round the table, holding one another by the hand. But all was submerged in a yellow mist, in which red faces were jumping about, with mouths slit from ear to ear. They had probably treated themselves to something stronger than ordinary wine towards the end, and there was even a vague suspicion that someone had played them the trick of putting salt into the glasses. The children must have undressed and put themselves to bed. On the morrow Madame Boche boasted that she had given Boche a couple of boxes on the ear in a corner, where he was conversing a great deal too close to the charcoal dealer; but Boche, who recollected nothing, treated this as a joke. Lorilleux and Poisson, feeling their stomachs deranged, had stumblingly glided as far as the pork-butcher's shop. It is easy to see when a person has been well brought up. For instance, the ladies, Madame Putois, Madame Lerat, and Virginie, indisposed by the heat, had simply gone into the back room and removed their stays; Virginie had even desired to lie on the bed just for a minute, to prevent any unpleasant effects. Then the party had seemed to melt away, some disappearing behind the others, all accompanying one another, and being lost sight of in the surrounding darkness, to the accompaniment of a final uproar, a furious dispute between the Lorilleux, and an obstinate and mournful "trou la la, trou la la," of old Bru's. Gervaise had an impression that Goujet had burst out sobbing when bidding her good-bye; Coupeau was still singing; and as for Lantier, he must have remained till the end. At one moment even she could still feel a breath against her hair, but she was unable to say whether it came from Lantier or if it was the warm night air.

As Madame Lerat refused at that late hour to return to Batignolles, they took a mattress off the bed, and spread it for her in a corner of the shop, after pushing the table aside. She slept there, amidst the crumbs from the feast. And all through the night, during the heavy sleep of the Coupeaus, digesting all they had swallowed, a neighbour's cat taking advantage of a window which had been left open, crunched up the goose bones, and finished burying the bird with the little sound of its sharp teeth.

CHAPTER VIII.

On the following Saturday, Coupeau, who had not returned to dinner, brought Lantier with him about ten o'clock. They had had some sheep's feet at Thomas's at Montmartre.

"You mustn't growl, old woman," said the zinc-worker. "We're all right, you see. Oh! there's no danger when with him; he keeps one in the good path."

And he told how they happened to meet in the Rue Rochechouart. After dinner, Lantier had declined to have a drink at the "Black Ball" *café*, saying that when one was married to a pretty and proper little woman, one ought not to go liquoring up at all the wine-shops. Gervaise smiled slightly as she listened. Certainly she was not thinking of scolding; she felt too much put out for that. Ever since the feast, she had been expecting to see her old lover again, one day or other; but, at such an hour, just at bedtime, the sudden arrival of the two men had taken her by surprise; and, with trembling hands, she fastened up her chignon again, as her hair had unrolled down her neck.

"You know," resumed Coupeau, "as he was so polite as to decline a drink outside, you must treat us to one here. Ah! you may well give us that!"

The workwomen had been gone a long while. Mother Coupeau and Nana had just gone to bed. So Gervaise, who was beginning to put up the

shutters when they appeared, left the shop open, and fetched some glasses and the remains of a bottle of brandy, which she placed on a corner of the work-table. Lantier remained standing, and avoided speaking directly to her. However, when she helped him, he exclaimed,—

“Only a ‘tear,’ madame, I beg of you.”

Coupeau looked at them, and then spoke his mind very plainly. They were not going to behave like a couple of geese, he hoped. The past was the past, was it not? If people nursed grudges after nine and ten years, one would end by no longer seeing anybody. No, no, he carried his heart in his hand, he did. First of all, he knew who he had to deal with, a worthy woman and a worthy man—in short, two friends. He felt easy; he knew he could depend upon their honour.

“Oh! that’s certain, quite certain,” repeated Gervaise, looking on the ground, and scarcely understanding what she was saying.

“She is a sister now—nothing but a sister,” murmured Lantier, in his turn.

“Shake hands, on God’s name!” cried Coupeau, “and don’t imitate the swells. When one has proper feelings, one is more comfortable than millionaires. For myself, I prefer friendship before everything, because friendship is friendship, and there’s nothing above it.”

He dealt himself heavy blows on the chest, and seemed so agitated that they had to calm him. They all three silently clinked glasses, and drank their drop. Gervaise was then able to look at Lantier at her ease; for, on the night of her saint’s day, she had only caught sight of him through a mist. He had grown stouter, was fat and round, and his legs and arms appeared heavy on account of his small figure. But his face preserved some handsome features beneath the bloated look of a life of idleness; and

as he always took great care of his little moustaches, one would have taken him for just his age—thirty-five years old. That day he wore a grey pair of trousers and a coarse blue overcoat, quite like a gentleman, with a billy cock hat; he even had a silver watch and chain, from which hung a ring—a keepsake.

"I'm going," said he. "I live no end of a distance from here."

He was already on the pavement, when the zinc-worker called him back to make him give his word never to pass the door without looking in to say good-day. Meanwhile, Gervaise, who had quietly disappeared, returned pushing Etienne before her. The child, who was in his shirt sleeves, and half asleep, smiled as he rubbed his eyes. But when he beheld Lantier, he stood trembling and put about, and casting anxious glances in the direction of his mother and Coupeau.

"Don't you remember this gentleman!" asked the latter.

The child held down his head without replying. Then he made a slight sign which meant that he did recollect the gentleman.

"Well! then, don't be such a stupid! go and kiss him."

Lantier grave and quiet, waited. When Etienne had decided to approach him he stooped down, presented both his cheeks, and then kissed the lad on the forehead himself. At this the latter ventured to look at his father; but all in a moment he burst out sobbing, and rushed off like a mad thing, with his clothes almost falling off him, whilst Coupeau angrily called him a young savage.

"It is the emotion," said Gervaise, pale and agitated herself.

"Oh! he's almost always very gentle and nice!" exclaimed Coupeau. "I've brought him up carefully as

you'll see. He'll get used to you. He must learn to know people. The fact is, had it only been on this youngster's account, we could not always have remained quarrelsome; is that not so? We ought to have made it up for his sake long ago, for I would sooner have my head cut off than prevent a father seeing his child."

After all this harangue he talked of finishing the bottle of brandy. All three clinked glasses again. Lantier showed no surprise, but remained quite calm. By way of repaying the zinc-worker's politeness, he persisted before taking his departure in helping him to close the shutters. Then rubbing his hands together to get rid of the dust on them, he wished the pair good-night.

"Sleep well. I shall try to catch the last 'bus. I promise you I'll look you up again soon."

From that evening Lantier frequently called at the Ruc de la Goutte-d'Or. He came when the zinc-worker was there; inquiring after his health the moment he passed the door, and affecting to have solely called for him. Then shaved, his hair nicely divided, and always wearing his overcoat, he would take a seat by the window, and converse politely with the manners of a man who had received a good education. It was thus that the Coupeaus learnt little by little some particulars of his life. During the last eight years he had for a while managed a hat factory; and when they asked him why he had retired from it, he merely alluded to the rascality of a partner, a man from his native place, a scoundrel who had eaten up the profits of the house with women. But his former position of employer was apparent all over his person, like a title of nobility from which he could not derogate. He was for ever saying that he was on the point of making a first-class arrangement; some wholesale manufacturers were about to establish him in business and trust him with an enormous stock. Meanwhile, he did nothing whatever but walk about in the sunshine with his hands in his pockets, like a gentleman. On the days when he complained, if any one ventured to tell

him of a factory in want of workmen, he seemed seized with a smiling pity; he had no desire to die of hunger whilst slaving for others.

But for all that, the fellow, as Coupeau would say, did not live on air. Oh! he was a sly chap. He knew how to get what he needed; he had some kind of private business for he always had such an appearance of prosperity, he must obtain money somehow to be able always to treat himself to white shirts and neckties worthy of the sons of men of family. One morning the zinc-worker saw him having his boots cleaned on the Boulevard Montmartre. The real truth was that Lantier, very talkative on the subject of other people, held his tongue or lied when it was a question of himself. He would not even say where he lived. No; he was lodging at a friend's, a devil of a way off, whilst waiting for a good position; and he said no one need call for him, because he was never at home.

"One can find ten places when one only wants one," he could often explain. "Only, it's not worth while entering a situation where you're not going to remain twenty-four hours. Thus, one Monday, I arrived at Champion's at Montrouge. In the evening Champion annoyed me about politics; he had not the same ideas as I. Well! on the Tuesday morning off I went, for we're no longer in the days of slavery, and I'm not going to sell myself for seven francs a day."

It was now the early part of November, Lantier gallantly bought bunches of violets which he brought to Gervaise and the two workwomen. Little by little he multiplied his visits, until he came almost every day. He seemed as though he wished to make a conquest of the household, of the whole neighbourhood; and he commenced by winning the hearts of Clemence and Madame Putois, to whom, without distinction of age, he was most attentive. At the end of a month the two workwomen positively adored him. The Boches, whom he flattered tremendously by paying them little visits in their room, were in ecstasies over his politeness. As

been seen. Goodness gracious ! it was an old friend of his whom he saw now and then, when it was not likely to annoy anyone. She was a tremendous swell, and had splendid ebony furniture. He liked women who had plenty of scent about them. And he was pushing his handkerchief, which the little one had scented for him, under Clemence's nose, when Etienne entered. Then he assumed his grave manner, kissed the child, while he added that the little amusement would go no further ; his heart was dead. Gervaise, bending over her work, nodded her head with an air of approval.

When the spring-time returned, Lantier, who was now quite one of the family, spoke of living in the neighbourhood, so as to be nearer his friends. He would like a furnished room in a respectable house. Madame Boche, and even Gervaise herself, went searching about to find what he desired. They explored the streets round about. But he was always too difficult to please ; he required a big courtyard, a room on the ground floor ; in fact, every luxury that could be conceived. And then every evening, at the Coupeaus', he appeared to be measuring the height of the ceilings, studying the arrangement of the rooms, and coveting a similar lodging. Oh, he would never have sought for anything better, he would willingly have made himself a hole in that warm, quiet corner. Then each time he finished his inspection with these words,—

“Sapristi ! you are comfortably situated here.”

One evening, when he had dined there, and was making the same remark during the dessert, Coupeau, who had got now to treat him most familiarly, all at once exclaimed,—

“You must stay here, old boy, if it suits you. It's easily managed.”

And he declared that the dirty-clothes room, cleaned out would make a nice apartment. Etienne could sleep in the shop, on a mattress on the ground, that was all.

“No, no,” said Lantier, “I cannot accept. It would

inconvenience you too much. I know that it's willingly offered, but we should be too warm all mixed up together. Besides, you know, each one likes to have his own liberty. I should have to go through your room, and that wouldn't be exactly proper."

"Ah, the rascal!" resumed the zinc-worker, choking with laughter, bringing his fist down on the table as if to clear his throat. "But, you joker, we're of an inventive turn of mind! There're two windows in the room, aren't there? Well, we'll knock one out and turn it into a door. Then, you understand, you come in by way of the courtyard, and we can even close up the other door, if we like. Thus you'll be in your home, and we in ours."

A pause followed. At length, the hâtier murmured,—

"Ah, yes, in that manner, perhaps, we might arrange it. And yet no, I should be too much in your way."

• He avoided looking at Gervaise. But he was evidently waiting for a word from her before going into the affair. She was very much put out by her husband's idea: not that the thought of seeing Lantier living with them wounded her feelings, or made her particularly uncomfortable; but she was wondering where she would be able to stow away the dirty clothes. Meanwhile, the zinc-worker began commenting on the advantages of the arrangement. The five-hundred-francs rent had always been rather too much for them. Well, their comrade should pay them twenty francs a month for the furnished room; it would not be too dear for him, and it would be a considerable help to them on the rent days. He added that he would undertake to knock up a big case under their bed which would hold all the dirty clothes of the district. Then Gervaise hesitated, and with a glance seemed to consult mother Coupeau, whom Lantier had conciliated months before by bringing her jujubes for her cough.

"You would certainly not be in our way," she ended by saying. "We could so continue things—"

"No, no, thanks," repeated the latter. "You're too kind; it would be asking too much."

Coupeau could no longer restrain himself. Was he going on inventing objections after they had told him it was freely offered? He would be putting them under an obligation, there, did he understand? Then in an excited tone of voice he yelled,—

"Etienne! Etienne!"

The youth had fallen asleep on the table. He raised his head with a start.

"Listen, tell him that you desire it. Yes, that gentleman there. Tell him as loud as you can: 'I wish it!'"

"I wish it!" stuttered Etienne, his voice indistinct with sleep.

Everyone laughed. But Lantier soon resumed his grave and impressive air. He squeezed Coupeau's hand over the table as he said,—

"I accept. It's in all good fellowship on both sides, is it not? Yes, I accept for the sake of the boy."

As early as the morrow—the landlord, M. Marescot, having come to spend an hour in the Boche's room—Gervaise spoke to him about the matter. At first he appeared very apprehensive, refused, and became quite ill-natured, as though she asked him to knock down a whole wing of his house. Then, after a minute inspection of the premises, and when he had gazed up in the air to see whether the upper storeys would be shaken, he ended by giving the required permission, but only on the understanding that he should not be called upon to bear any portion of the expense; and the Coupeaus had to sign a paper in which they undertook to leave everything in the same condition as they had found it, at the expiry of their term. That very evening, the zinc-worker brought some of his comrades, a mason, a carpenter, a painter—some jolly fellows who would make the alterations after their day's work, just to oblige a friend. The putting up of the new door and the cleaning out of the room, however, cost a hundred francs, not to speak of the wine with

which the business was watered. The zinc-worker told his comrades he would pay them later on with the first money he received from his first tenant. Then, there was the question of furnishing the room. Gervaise left mother Coupeau's wardrobe in it; she added a table and two chairs taken from her own room; then she had to purchase a toilet-table, and a bedstead and the complete bedding, amounting altogether to a hundred and thirty francs, which she had to pay for at the rate of ten francs a month. If in the first ten months Lantier's twenty francs of rent were eaten up beforehand by the debts contracted, there would nevertheless be a pretty profit afterwards.

It was during the early days of June that the hatter moved in. He arrived in the afternoon, towards three o'clock. Coupeau did not happen to be in. And Gervaise, standing at the shop door, became quite pale, on recognising the box outside the cab. It was their old box, the one with which they had journeyed from Plassans, all scratched and broken now, and bound together by cords. She saw it return as she had often dreamt it would, and it was easy to imagine and to believe that the same cab, that cab in which that brute of a burnisher had played her such a foul trick, had brought the box back again. Meanwhile Boche was giving Lantier a turn of his hand. The laundress followed them silent, and feeling rather stupefied. When they had deposited their burden in the middle of the room, she said, just to say something,—

“Well! that's a good thing done, isn't it?”

Then, recovering herself, seeing that Lantier, busy in undoing the cords, was not even looking at her, she added:

“Monsieur Boche, you must take a drink.”

And she went and fetched a quart of wine and some glasses.

Just then Poisson was passing along the pavement in uniform. She made a little signal to him, winking her

eye with a smile. The policeman understood perfectly. When he was on duty, and anyone winked their eye to him, it meant that they were about to offer him a glass of wine. He would even walk for hours up and down before the laundress's, waiting for a wink. Then, so as not to be seen, he would pass through the courtyard, and take off the liquor in secret.

"Ah! ah!" said Lantier, when he saw him enter, "it's you, Badingue?"

He called him Badingue for a jest, just to show how little he cared for the Emperor. Poisson put up with it in his stiff way, without one being able to tell whether it really vexed him or not. Besides, the two men, though separated by their political convictions, had become very good friends.

"You know that the Emperor was once a policeman in London," said Boche, in his turn. "Yes, on my word! It was during the Chartist riots."

Gervaise meanwhile had filled three glasses on the table. She would not drink herself, she felt too sick at heart, but she stood there with a longing to see what the box contained, and watching Lantier remove the last cords. She remembered that in one corner there used to be a heap of socks, two shirts, and an old hat! Were those things still in it? Was she going to look again at the rags and tatters of the past? Before raising the lid, Lantier took his glass and clinked it with the others.

"Good health to you."

"Same to you," replied Boche and Poisson.

The laundress refilled the glasses. The three men wiped their lips on the back of their hands. And at last the latter opened the box. It was full of a mixture of newspapers, books, old clothes, and underlinen, in bundles. He took out successively a saucepan, a pair of boots, a bust of Ladru-Rollin with the nose broken, an embroidered shirt, and a pair of working trousers. And Gervaise, leaning over, inhaled a stench of tobacco, an odour of a dirty person who only washes the surface,

just so much as is seen of his person. No, the old hat was no longer in the left-hand corner; but there was a pincushion there which she did not recognise, a present doubtless from some woman. Then she calmed herself; she experienced a vague sadness as she followed the various objects with her eyes, asking herself whether they dated from her time or from the time of the others.

"I say, Badingue, you don't know this, do you?" resumed Lantier.

He thrust under his nose a little book printed at Brussels, "The Amours of Napoleon III.," illustrated with engravings.

He placed his books and his newspapers on a shelf in the wardrobe; and as he seemed to very much regret not having a little book-case suspended above the table, Gervaise promised to secure him one. He possessed the "History of Ten Years," by Louis Blanc, with the exception of the first volume, which, by the way, he had never had; Lamartine's "Girondins," in two numbers; Eugene Sue's "Mysteries of Paris" and the "Wandering Jew," besides a number of philosophical and humanitarian works, picked up at second-hand dealers. But he, above all, looked at his newspapers with a tender and respectful glance. It was a collection he had been forming for years past. Every time that he chanced to read at a *café* a successful newspaper article written in accordance with his own ideas, he would purchase the paper and preserve it. He had thus formed an enormous bundle of all dates and titles, jumbled up anyhow. When he had removed this bundle from the bottom of the box, he slapped it in a friendly way, saying to the other two men,—

"You see that? Well, it belongs to 'this child,' and no one can flatter himself he has anything so first-class. You've no idea what it contains. That's to say, if half these ideas were carried out, society would be cleansed at once. Yes, your Emperor, and all his jackasses would quake in their shoes——"

But he was interrupted by the policeman, whose carrotty moustaches and imperial trembled on his pale face.

"And the army, I say, what would you do with it?"

Then Lantier flew into a passion. As he planted blows of his fist on the newspapers, he yelled,—

"I desire the suppression of militarism, the fraternity of nations. I require the abolition of privileges, of titles, and of monopolies. I desire the equality of salaries, the division of benefits, the glorification of the protectorate. All liberties, do you hear? all of them! And divorce!"

"Yes, yes, divorce for morality!" insisted Boche.

Poisson had assumed a majestic air.

"Yes, if I won't have your liberties; I'm quite free to say that!" he answered.

"If you won't have them—if you won't have them," stuttered Lantier, whose passion nearly choked him. "No, you're not free! If you won't have them, I'll send you off to Cayenne, that I will do! Yes, to Cayenne, with your Emperor and all the pigs that are about him!"

They always quarrelled thus every time they met. Gervaise, who did not like arguments in ordinary cases, interfered. She roused herself from the torpor into which the sight of the box, full of the stale perfume of her past love, had thrown her, and she drew the three men's attention to the glasses.

"Ah! yes," said Lantier, suddenly calmed, and lifting his glass. "Good health!"

"Good health," replied Boche and Poisson, clinking glasses with him.

Boche, meanwhile, was moving nervously about, troubled by an anxiety, and looking at the policeman from the corner of his eye.

"All this between ourselves; eh, Monsieur Poisson?" murmured he at length. "We say and show you certain things——"

But Poisson did not let him close his speech. He placed his hand upon his heart, as though to make it clear that all remained buried there. He certainly did not go about acting the spy on his friends. Coupeau having now come in, they emptied a second quart. Then the policeman went off by way of the courtyard, and resumed his stiff and measured tread along the pavement.

During the first few days all was in confusion at the laundress's. Lantier truly enough had his separate room, his own entrance and his key, but as, at the last moment, they had decided not to close the door communicating between the two rooms, it happened that he most frequently went through the shop. She was greatly bothered too by having to make up Etienne's bed every evening in the middle of the shop; when the workwomen were there late, the child would go to sleep on a chair whilst waiting. Then Goujet, having suggested sending Etienne to Lille, where his former employer, a mechanician, was in want of apprentices, she was quite charmed with the project, the more so as the lad, who was not very happy at home, and longed to be his own master, begged her to consent to his going. Only, she was afraid of a decided refusal from Lantier. He had come to live with them, solely to be near his son; he would not wish to part with him a fortnight after the arrangements. Yet, when she tremblingly mentioned the matter to him, he approved the project immensely, saying that young workmen always ought to see plenty of their country. The morning Etienne left, he made him a little speech about his rights, then he kissed him and declaimed,—

“Remember that the producer is not a slave, but whoever is not a producer is a drone.”

Then the routine of the house went on again, everyone calmed down and fell into the new habits. Gervaise became accustomed to Lantier passing to and fro. The latter was always talking of his large business affairs; he would sometimes go out with his hair nicely combed and

wearing a clean white shirt, and after disappearing for a while, perhaps not even returning to sleep, he would come back pretending he was quite worn out, and that his head was splitting, as though he had been discussing the most weighty matters for twenty-four hours at a stretch. The truth was, that he was taking life easy. He usually rose in the morning at about ten o'clock, took a stroll in the afternoon if the colour of the sun pleased him, or, if it rained, remained in the shop reading the newspaper. It was his element; he enjoyed his ease amongst the skirts, in the thick of the women, delighting in their free language, inciting them on to speak more all the time, talking in the most choice manner himself; and that explained why he was so fond of rubbing against the washerwomen, for they are by no means prudes.

At the beginning, Lantier took his meals at François's, at the corner of the Rue des Poissonniers. But three or four of the seven days in the week he dined with the Coupeaus; and he ended by proposing to board with them, and proposed to pay them fifteen francs every Saturday. From that time, he scarcely ever left the house, but installed himself completely. He would be seen from morning till night going to and fro in his shirt sleeves between the shop and the room at the back, raising his voice and giving his orders; he even attended to the customers; he directed everything. François's wine not pleasing him, he persuaded Gervaise to order her wine in future of Vigouroux, the charcoal-dealer close by, whose wife he would go and chaff with Boche, whilst giving the orders. Then he contended that Coudeloup's bread was badly baked, and he sent Augustine to get the bread from Meyer, who kept the Viennesse bakery in the Faubourg Poissonnière. He also took away the custom from Le Longre, the grocer, and only continued to deal with big Charles, the butcher of the Rue Polonceau, because of his political opinions. At the end of a month, he wished oil to be used in every

dish served at the table. As Clemence observed by way of chaff, the oil stain reappeared on that confounded Provençal in spite of all. He himself prepared the omelets—omelets turned over on both sides, more browned than pancakes, and as firm as galettes. He superintended mother Coupeau, insisting on her cooking the beefsteaks until they became like shoe-leather, adding garlic to everything, and getting quite angry if anyone put herbs into the salad, beastly weeds, according to him, amongst which there might easily be something poisonous. But his special delight was a certain soup, vermicelli, cooked in water, very thick, into which he poured half a bottle of oil. Only he and Gervaise ever ate it, because the others, the Parisians, having one day ventured to taste it, had almost fainted from nausea.

Then there was Nana, too; she was being brought up pretty badly, according to his idea. In that he was right, for, whenever the father spanked her, the mother took her side, and if the mother in her turn boxed her ears, the father made an noise. Nana, delighted at seeing her parents snapping at each other, and knowing that she was forgiven beforehand, was up to all sorts of games. Her latest fancy was to go and play in the farriery opposite; she would pass the entire day swinging on the shafts of the carts; she would hide with bands of urchins in the remotest corners of the grey courtyard, lighted up with the red glare of the forge; and, suddenly, she would reappear, running and shouting, unkempt and dirty, and followed by the troop of youngsters, as though a clanging of the hammers had frightened these dirty little brats away. Lan'ier alone could scold her; and yet she knew perfectly well how to coax him. This hussy of ten would walk before him like a lady, twisting herself about, and casting side glances at him, her eyes already full of wickedness. He had ended by undertaking her education; he taught her to dance and talk patois.

A year rolled by in this style. In the neighbourhood it was thought that Lantier had a private income, for this was the only way to account for the Coupeau's grand style of living. No doubt, Gervaise continued to earn money; but now that she had to support two men who were doing nothing, the shop certainly could not be sufficient; more especially as the shop was not getting such a good name, customers were leaving and the workwomen were fuddling from morning till night. The fact was that Lantier paid nothing, neither for rent nor board. During the first months he had paid sums on account, then he had contented himself with speaking of a large amount he had to receive, and thanks to that source he would pay off everything in a round sum. Gervaise no longer dared ask him for a centime. She had the bread, the wine, the meat, all on credit. The bills increased everywhere at the rate of three or four francs a day. She had not paid a sou to the furniture-dealer, nor to the three comrades, the mason, the carpenter, and the painter. All these creditors commenced to grumble, and she ceased to be treated with the same politeness at the shops.

But she was as though intoxicated by a mania for getting into debt; she tried to forget this, ordered the most expensive things, and gave full freedom to her gluttony now that she no longer paid for anything; she remained through all this very honest at heart, dreaming of earning from morning to night hundreds of francs, though she did not exactly know in what manner, that it might enable her to distribute handfuls of five-franc pieces to her tradespeople. In short she was sinking, and as she sank lower and lower, she talked of extending her business. Yet, towards the middle of the summer, tall Clemence had left her, because there was no longer sufficient work for two women, and because she had to wait weeks for her money. In the midst of this downfall, Coupeau and Lantier thoroughly enjoyed themselves. The fellows gorged till they filled them-

selves up to their chins, eating up the shop, fattening on the ruin of the establishment; and they stimulated each other to take double helpings, and at dessert playfully slapped one another on the back, to help them digest their food more quickly.

The great subject of conversation in the neighbourhood was as to whether Lantier had really gone back to his old relations with Gervaise. On this point opinions were divided. If one listened to the Lorilleux, the Hobbler was doing all that she could to get hold of the hatter again, but he would no longer have anything to do with her, thought her too faded, and had in town some flame of a very different stamp. All that, one way or another, was not very correct; but there are so many abominable things in life, and far worse than this, that people finished up the discussion by thinking this family of three quite natural, and even nice, for there was never any quarrelling, and appearances were respected. It was quite the case that if one poked one's nose into some other homes in the neighbourhood, one would be poisoned with something much more disgusting. At the Coupeau's they seemed at least a jolly set. All three looked after their own little cooking, drank and lived together in a friendly way without interfering with their neighbours' sleep. Besides, the neighbourhood was conquered by Lantier's pleasant ways. That cajoler shut every gossip's mouth. Even in the doubt that existed as to his relations with Gervaise, when the green-grocer told the tripe-seller there was no truth in the reports, the latter seemed to say that it was really a pity, because, in short, it rendered the Coupeau's far less interesting.

Gervaise, however, was quite at her ease in this matter, and not much troubled with these shameful thoughts. Things reached the point that she was accused of wanting heart. The family did not understand why she bore a grudge against the hatter. Madame Lerat, who delighted in thrusting herself between lovers, came every evening; and she said that Lantier was an irresistible

man. A secret and continuous conspiracy was formed, gradually inciting Gervaise, as if all the women around her would be satisfying their own desires in making her faithless to her husband. But Gervaise was amazed at this, and did not consider Lantier to be so particularly seductive. No doubt he had improved; he always wore a coat and he had acquired some education in the *cafés* and at political meetings. Only, she knew him well; she could read his very soul through the two holes of his eyes, and she found there a number of things which made her tremble. In short, if it pleased the others so much, why did they not venture and go in for the gentleman? It was thus that one day she answered Virginie, who showed herself the warmest in the matter. Then, to excite Gervaise, Madame Lerat and Virginie told her of the loves of Lantier and tall Clemence. Yes, she had not noticed anything herself. Now people met them out together.

"Well," said the laundress, her voice trembling slightly, "what can it matter to me?"

And she looked into Virginie's yellow eyes, in which golden sparks were shining as in a cat's. This woman then wished her harm, as she sought to make her jealous. But the dressmaker put on her stupid air as she remarked,—

"It can't matter anything to you, of course. Only you ought to advise him to break off with that girl, who is sure to cause him some mischief."

The worst was that Lantier, feeling himself assisted by those people, changed altogether in his manner towards Gervaise. Now, whenever he shook hands with her, he held her fingers for a minute between his own. He fatigued her with his glance, fixing bold eyes upon her, in which she clearly read what it was he asked. One evening, finding himself alone with her, he pushed her before him without saying a word, and pressed her all trembling against the wall, at the back of the shop, and there tried to kiss her. By chance, Goujet entered just

at that moment. Then she struggled and escaped. And all three exchanged a few words, as though nothing had occurred. Goujet, his face deathly pale, lowered his glance, fancying that he had disturbed them, and that she had merely struggled so as not to be kissed before another.

On the morrow, Gervaise wandered about the shop, feeling very unhappy and quite unable even to iron a handkerchief; she was anxious to see Goujet, to explain to him how it was that Lantier was holding her against the wall. But since Etienne had gone to Lille, she no longer dared enter the forge, where Salted-Mouth, *alias* Drink-without Thirst, always greeted her with sly laughs. Yet in the afternoon, yielding to her desire, she took an empty basket and went out, under the pretext of fetching some petticoats from the customer in the Rue des Portes-Blanches. Then, when she arrived opposite the bolt factory in the Rue Marcadet, she walked more slowly, trusting to some chance meeting. Goujet, on his part, had no doubt been looking for her, for she had not been there five minutes before he came out, just as though by chance.

"What! you've been on an errand?" said he, faintly; "you're going home?"

He said that just to be saying something. It so happened that Gervaise was turning her back on the Rue des Poissonniers. And they went up towards Montmartre side by side, and without taking one another's arms. Their only idea seemed to be to get away from the factory, so as not to appear to be having meetings before the door. With their heads bent down, they followed the uneven roadway, in the midst of the hum of the factories. Then, after going along about two hundred yards, they naturally, as though they knew the place, turned without a word to the left and entered a piece of waste land. It was a bit of meadow still green, but with yellow patches of scorched grass, and situated between a saw-mill and a button manufactory; a goat, fastened to a stake, kept turning round and bleating;

right at the end, a dead tree was rotting away in the bright sunshine.

"Really!" murmured Gervaise, "one can believe oneself in the country."

They went and sat down on the dead tree. The laundress placed her basket at her feet. Just before them, the heights of Montmartre spread out their rows of high grey and yellow houses, in midst of scanty clumps of verdure; and, when they leant their heads further back, they looked upon the vast expanse of sky of a dazzling brightness above the town, and streaked towards the north by a flight of small white clouds. But the brilliant light dazzled them; they lowered their glances to the distant white buildings of the faubourgs on a level with the flat horizon, and they especially kept their eyes on the narrow chimney of the saw-mill, which kept puffing forth jets of steam. These great sighs seemed to relieve their oppressed breasts.

"Yes," resumed Gervaise, embarrassed by their continued silence, "I was going on an errand, I came out——"

After having been so anxious for an explanation, she suddenly found she could not say anything. She was seized with a great shame. However, she felt that they had come there of their own accord to talk of the matter; they were indeed conversing about it, without having the need to utter a single word. The occurrence of the day before remained between them like a weight which oppressed them.

Then, seized with an overwhelming sadness, her eyes full of tears, she gave an account of the agony of Madame Bijard, her washerwoman, who had died that morning, after the most terrible sufferings.

"It was all because of that kicking Bijard gave her," said she, in a gentle, monotonous voice. "No doubt he had broken something in her inside. Good heavens! in three days it was all over with her. Ah! there are many blackguards in prison who have not done anything so

bad as he has. But justice would have too much to do if it occupied itself about all the women who have been killed by their husbands. One kick more or less doesn't count, does it, when one's in the habit of receiving them the whole day? More especially as the poor woman desired to save her husband from the scaffold, and stated that she had hurt her stomach by falling on a tub. She yelled all through the night before going off."

The blacksmith was silent, but pulled up the grass with his trembling fingers.

"It's only a fortnight ago," continued Gervaise, "that she weaned her last, little Jules; and that's a piece of good fortune, for the child won't suffer from it. All the same, there's that child Lalie has got to look after the two little kids. She's not eight years old yet, but she's as serious and sensible as if she were really a mother. With that, her father always knocks her about. Ah well! one meets people who are born to suffer."

Goujet looked at her, and said abruptly, his lips trembling as he spoke,—

"You caused me great pain yesterday; oh! yes, great pain."

Gervaise, growing quite pale, clasped her hands. But he continued,—

"I know it was bound to come about. Only, you should have confided in me, have told me the truth about it, so as not to have let me form ideas——"

He could not finish. She rose up when she understood that Goujet thought she had resumed her old relations with Lantier, as the whole neighbourhood declared was the case. And, stretching out her arms, she cried,—

"No, no, I swear to you. He had pushed me there; he was attempting to kiss me, it's true, but his face did not even touch mine, and it was the first time he had tried anything of the sort. Oh, listen! I swear it by my life, by the lives of my children, on all that I hold most sacred!"

The blacksmith, however, shook his head. He doubted her, because women always deny. Gervaise then became very grave, and slowly went on,—

“You know me, Monsieur Goujet, you know I am by no means a liar. Well, no, this is not so, on my word of honour. And it will never be so, do you hear? never! The day such a thing were to come about, I should become the lowest of the low; I should no longer deserve the friendship of an honest man like you.”

And as she spoke, her face was so beautiful, so full of truth, that he took her hand and made her resume her seat. Now he could breathe freely; he laughed within himself. It was the first time he had held her hand like that, and he pressed it in his own. They both sat without speaking. The little white clouds moved over the sky with slowness like a swan. In the corner of the field, the goat turned towards them, looked on, bleating gently at long, regular intervals. And without loosening their clasp of each other's fingers, their eyes bathed in tenderness, they looked into the distance at the pale Montmartre slope in the middle of the tall forest of factory chimneys on the borders of the horizon, in that desolate suburb of mortar, amidst which the green arbours of the low pot-houses moved them to tears.

“Your mother is ill-pleased with me, I know she is,” resumed Gervaise in a low voice. “Don't tell me that she isn't. We owe you so much money!”

He became almost rough to induce her to leave off. He shook her hand as though he would break it. He did not wish her to speak of the money. He hesitated, but at length stammered,—

“Listen! for a long time past I have been thinking of making a special proposal to you. You're not happy. My mother assures me that life is going badly with you——”

He stopped a moment; he was almost choking.

“Well! we should go off together.”

She looked at him, not understanding him exactly at

first, and surprised by that rough declaration of a love as to which he had never before opened his lips.

"In what way?" asked she.

"Yes," continued he, with his head bent down still, "we could go off; we could live somewhere together, in Belgium if you like. It's almost my own country. And with both of us working we should soon be quite comfortable."

Then she became very red. Had he pressed her against him and kissed her, she would have felt less shame. He was a queer fellow all the same, to propose an elopement to her, just as takes place in novels and in high life. Ah, well! all round about her she saw workmen courting married women; but they did not even take them as far as Saint-Denis.

"Ah! Monsieur Goujet, Monsieur Goujet!" she murmured, without finding anything else to say.

"In other words, we should only be our two selves," resumed he. "The others are disagreeable to me, you understand. When I have a liking for a person, I hate to see that person with others."

But she was recovering herself; she refused now, with a sober-minded manner.

"It is not possible, Monsieur Goujet. It would be very wicked. I'm married, am I not? I've children. I know very well that you have a great fondness for me, and that I cause you pain. Only we should suffer remorse; we should taste no real pleasure. I, also, have a great friendship for you. I feel too much to let you do anything foolish. And it would be certainly very unwise. No, we had far better remain as we are. We esteem each other: we find our sentiments are the same. That is much; this feeling has sustained me many a time. When people in our position keep to the right path, they have their good reward."

He nodded his head as he listened to her. He approved what she said; he could not affirm the contrary. Suddenly, in the full light of day, he took her in his arms,

pressing her as if to crush her, and kissed her furiously on the neck, as if he would devour her skin. Then he let her go without asking anything further, and he spoke no more of their love. She put her things straight, but did not seem annoyed, feeling that they had both well earned that little pleasure.

The blacksmith, shaking from head to foot with a great trembling, drew away from her, so as not to yield to the desire to seize hold of her again; and he crawled along on his knees, not knowing in what way to occupy his hands, picking dandelions, which he threw into her basket from a distance. In the midst of the grass, which was quite scorched, there were some superb yellow dandelions. Little by little, this occupation calmed and amused him. He gathered the flowers delicately, with fingers that were stiff with wielding the hammer, and threw them one by one, while his kind-looking eyes smiled whenever he did not miss the basket. The laundress, gay and rested, was leaning against the dead tree, and she raised her voice to make herself heard above the panting noise of the saw-mill. When they quitted the waste ground, walking side by side, talking of Etienne, who was very happy at Lilie, she carried away her basket full of dandelions.

There is one thing to be said. Coupeau and Lantier were for ever going out on the spree together. Lantier would now borrow money of Gervaise—ten francs, twenty francs at a time, whenever he scented that there was money in the house. He was always talking of the big business he was going into. Then, on those days, he would keep Coupeau away from his work, talk of some distant call he had to make, and take him with him; and seated opposite to each other in a corner of some neighbouring restaurant, they would swallow up dishes which they could get at home, and wash them down with bottles of sealed wine. The zinc-worker would have preferred a humbler and livelier style; but he was impressed by the aristocratic tastes of the hatter, who would discover on the

bill of fare dishes with the most extraordinary names. One could never have imagined a man so delicate and so hard to please. But they are all like that, it seems, in the south. For instance, he would have nothing heating; he discussed each stew from a sanitary point of view, having the meat taken away again whenever he thought it too salt or too peppery. It was worse still if there was a draught; it filled him with a mortal dread; he abused the whole establishment if a door was left ajar. With all that, he was very stingy, only giving to the waiter a couple of sous after a meal costing seven or eight francs.

Nevertheless, people trembled before him, and the pair were both well known along the exterior Boulevards, from Batignolles to Belleville. They would go to the Grande Rue des Batignolles to eat tripe cooked in the Caen style, and served on little hot-water plates. At the foot of Montmartre, they got the best oysters of the neighbourhood, at the "Town of Bar-le-Duc." When they ventured to the top of the height, as far as the "Galette Windmill," they had a stewed rabbit. The "Lilacs" in the Rue des Martyrs had a reputation for their calf's head; whilst the restaurants of the "Golden Lion" and the "Two Chestnut Trees," in the Chaussée Clignancourt, served them stewed kidneys, which made them lick their lips. But they more often went to the left towards Belleville, where there was always a table kept for them at the "Vintages of Burgundy," the "Blue Dial," and the "Capuchin," houses one could depend upon, where one could order everything with one's eyes shut. They were sly little parties, which they talked of on the morrow in words of hidden meaning, whilst they trifled with Gervaise's fried potatoes. One day, even in one of the harbours of the "Galette Windmill," Lantier brought a lady-friend, with whom Coupeau left him at dessert.

One naturally cannot both gormandise and work; so that, ever since the latter had become, as it were, one of the family, the zinc-worker, who was already pretty lazy, had arrived at the point of never touching a tool. When,

tired of knocking about doing nothing, he let himself be prevailed upon to take up a piece of work, his comrade would look him up, and chaff him unmercifully when he found him hanging to his knotted cord like a smoked ham; and he would call to him to come down and have a drink. And that finished it; the zinc-worker would leave the job he was engaged on, and commence a spree which lasted days and weeks. Oh, it was a splendid spree, a general review of all the drink-shops of the neighbourhood, the intoxication of the morning slept off by mid-day, and renewed in the evening; the "nips" of "vitriol" succeeded one another, losing themselves in the depths of the night, like the Venetian lanterns of an illumination, until the last candle went out with the last glass. That rascal of a hatter never kept on to the end. He let the other get elevated, then slipped away from him, and returned home smiling in his pleasant way. He coloured 'his nose decently without people's noticing it. When one knew him well, one could only tell it by his half-closed eyes and his overbold behaviour to women. The zinc-worker, on the contrary, became quite disgusting, and could no longer drink without putting himself into a brutal state.

Thus, towards the beginning of November, Coupeau went in for a spree, which ended in a most disgraceful manner both for himself and the others. The day before he had been offered some work. This time Lantier was full of fine sentiments; he praised work because work ennobles a man. In the morning he even rose before it was light, for he gravely wished to accompany his friend to the workshop, honouring in him the workman really worthy of that name. But when they arrived before the "Little Civet," which was opening, they entered to have a plum in brandy, only one, merely to drink together to the firm resolution of good conduct. Facing the counter, and with his back against the wall, was Bibi-the-Smoker, with a sulky look on his face, smoking his pipe on a bench.

"Hallo! here's Bibi doing the 'panther,'" said Coupeau. "Are you down in the 'dolefuls,' old chap?"

"No, no," replied the comrade, stretching his arms. "It's the employers who disgust me. I sent mine to blazes yesterday. They're all toads, all scoundrels."

And Bibi-the-Smoker accepted a plum. He was, no doubt, waiting there on that bench for someone to stand him a drink. Lantier, however, took the part of the employers; they often had some very bad fortune, as he, who had been in business himself, well knew. Workmen were a rummy lot, always on the spree, not caring a button about their work, leaving one in the lurch in the midst of some special contract, and only putting in an appearance again when their money was all gone. For instance, he had had a little Picardian whose mania was to go driving about; yes, the moment he had got his week's screw, he took cabs for days together. Was that a taste such as a worker ought to indulge in? Then suddenly Lantier also attacked the employers. "Oh, he saw clearly, he would tell everyone the truth about them. A dirty race, after all, fellows without the least shame, regular man-eaters. He, thank Heaven! could sleep with an easy conscience, for he had always treated his men as friends, and had preferred not to make millions, like the others."

"Let's hook it, my boy," said he, speaking to Coupeau. "We must be good, or we shall be late."

Bibi-the-Smoker went out with them, swinging his arms. Outside, the sun was scarcely rising, the pale daylight seemed soiled by the muddy reflection of the pavement; it had rained the night before, and it was very mild. The gas lamps had just been turned out; the Rue, in which shreds of night rent by the houses still floated, was filling with the dull tramp of the workmen descending towards Paris. Coupeau, with his zinc-worker's bag slung over his shoulder, walked along in the imposing manner of a fellow who means business once at any rate. He turned round and asked,—

The day had advanced ; a dim sort of light lit up the drinking den, where the landlord was putting out the gas. Coupeau, however, found excuses for his brother-in-law, who could not stand drink, which, after all, did not constitute a crime. He even approved Goujet's behaviour, for it was real good fortune never to be thirsty. And he talked of going off to his work, when Lantier, with his grand air of a gentleman, sharply gave him a lesson. One at least stood one's turn before slipping off ; one should not leave one's friends like a mean skunk, even when going to do one's duty.

"Is he going to bother us much longer about his work?" cried Mes-Bottes.

"So this is your turn, sir?" asked old Colombe, of Coupeau.

The latter paid. But when it came to Bibi-the-Smoker's turn, he whispered in the landlord's ear, but he refused, with a shake of the head. Mes-Bottes understood, and again set to abusing that old twister Colombe. "What ! a fellow like him dared to behave in that way to a comrade. Everybody else could get drink on tick ! It was only in such miserable pubs that one was insulted ! The landlord remained calm, leaning on his big fists on the edge of the counter, and politely said,—

"Lend the gentleman some money—that will be far simpler."

"Name of God ! yes, I'll lend him some," roared Mes-Bottes. "Here, Bibi, throw his money in his face, to this Satan-sold fellow !"

Then excited, and angry at seeing Coupeau with his bag slung over his shoulder, he went on, speaking to the zinc-worker,—

"You have the air of a wet-nurse. Drop your baby. It'll give you a humph back."

Coupeau hesitated an instant ; and then, quietly, as though he had only made up his mind after mature reflection, he laid his bag on the ground saying,—

"It's too late now. I'll go to Bourguignon's after

lunch. I'll tell him that my missus was ill. Listen, father Colombe, I'll leave my tools under this seat, and I'll call for them at twelve o'clock."

Lantier by a nod of his head signified his approval of this arrangement. One must work, no doubt; only, when one is with friends, politeness passes before everything. A desire to fuddle had gradually tickled and overcome the four of them, and they stood there with heavy hands as if examining each other's mind with a glance. And as soon as they saw they had five hours of idleness before them, they were suddenly seized with a noisy joy, giving each other friendly slaps, and bawling affectionate words in each other's faces. Coupeau especially, feeling relieved and younger, calling the others "my old cock!" They had one round of drinks, and then moved off to the "Sniffing Flea," a low drink-shop possessing a billiard table. The latter made a grimace at first, for it was not a very clean-looking place; the brandy there cost a franc the litre, ten sous a chopin in two glasses, and the customers had so soiled the billiard table that the balls stuck to it. But once the game had commenced, Lantier, who could handle a cue extraordinarily well, recovered his grace and his good temper, developing the trunk of his body, and accompanying each cannon with a swing of the hip.

When lunch time came, Coupeau had an idea. He stamped his feet as he cried,—

"We must go and get Salted-Mouth. I know where he's working. We'll take him to mother Louis's to have some pettitoes."

The idea was hailed with acclamation. Yes, Salted-Mouth, otherwise Drink-without-Thirst, was no doubt in want of some pettitoes. They set off. The streets had a yellowish look; a fine rain was falling. But they were too warm internally for them to feel the slight watering of their exteriors. Coupeau brought them to the bolt factory in the Rue Marcadet. As they got there a good half-hour before the workmen came out, the zinc-worker

gave a boy two sous to go in and tell Salted-Mouth that his wife was ill and wanted him immediately. The blacksmith made his appearance, waddling in his walk, looking very calm, and scenting a guzzle

"Ah! the jokers!" said he, as soon as he caught sight of them hiding in a doorway. "I guessed as much. Well! what are we going to eat?"

At mother Louis's, whilst they sucked the little bones of the pettitoes, they began again to run down the employers. Salted-Mouth, *alias* Drink-without-Thirst, related that they had a most pressing order to execute at his shop. Oh! the ape was pleasant for the nonce. One could be late, and he would say nothing; he no doubt considered himself lucky when anyone turned up at all.

"I," said Coupeau, with an air of importance, "I'm obliged to go off; I'm away to work. Yes, I swore it to my wife. Amuse yourselves; my heart, you know, remains with my comrades."

The others chaffed him. But he seemed so resolved that they all accompanied him, when he talked of going to fetch him his tools from father Colomb's. He took his bag from under the seat and set it on the ground before him whilst they had a final drop. But at one o'clock the party was still standing drinks round. Then Coupeau, with a gesture of annoyance, placed the tools back again under the seat. They were in his way; he could not get near the counter without almost tumbling over them. It was too ridiculous; he would go to Bourguignon's next day. The other four, who were quarrelling about the question of "screws," were not astonished when the zinc-worker, without any explanation, proposed a little "turn" on the Boulevard, just to stretch their legs. It had left off raining. The little stroll was confined to their going a couple of hundred steps all in a row and their arms swinging; and surprised by the fresh air, feeling annoyed at being out of doors, they hadn't a word to say to each other. Without even consulting together with so much

as a motion of the elbow, they slowly and instinctively ascended the Rue des Poissonniers, where they went to Francois's and had a glass of wine out of the bottle. Really, they were in wait of that to pull them together again. It was too melancholy out in the street; it was so muddy it would be a shame even to send a policeman beyond the doorway on such a day. Lantier pushed his comrades inside the private room; it was a narrow place with only one table in it, and was separated from the large shop by a dull glazed partition. He usually preferred to colour his nose in private rooms, because it was more respectable. Were they not all very comfortable in there? One could almost think oneself at home, and could have had forty winks without the least trouble. He called for the newspaper, spread it out open before him, and looked through it, with his eyebrows down the while. Coupeau and Mes-Bottes had commenced a game at piquet. Two bottles of wine and five glasses were all over the table.

"Well! what do they say in that news-bag?" asked Bibi-the-Smoker of the hatter.

He did not reply at once. Then, without raising his eyes, he said,—

"I'm reading the report of the Chamber. They're very 'two-penny-half-penny' republicans, those lazy scoundrels of the Left! Do the people elect them only to let them swill their sugar and water? Here's one who believes in God, and whose letting himself be humbugged by those rascals of ministers! Whereas I! if I were elected, I would get into the tribune and say, 'Merde!' yes, nothing more, that's my opinion!"

"You know, Badingue's had a fight with his missus, before all the court," related Salted-Mouth, *alias* Drink-without-Thirst. "I give you my word of honour it's true! And all about nothing, just a little family dispute. Badingue was a bit screwed."

"Have done with your politics!" cried the zinc-worker.

"Read us the murders, they're better fun"

And returning to his game, he declared a tierce from the nine and three queens.

"I've a tierce from the sewer and three doves. The crinolines don't give me up."

They emptied their glasses. Then Lantier read aloud,—

"A frightful crime has just spread consternation throughout the Commune of Gaillon (Department of Seine-et-Marne). A son has killed his father with blows from a spade, in order to steal from him thirty sous."

They all uttered a cry of horror. 'There was a fellow, good gracious! whom they would have taken great pleasure in seeing done for; no, the guillotine was not enough; he deserved to be cut into little pieces. The story of an infanticide equally revolted them; but the latter, highly moral, found excuses for the woman, putting all the responsibility of the wrong to the account of her betrayer; for after all, if some skunk of a man had not put the wretched woman into that condition, she could not have thrown a kid down the drain. But what really made them enthusiastic were the exploits of the Marquis de T——, who, leaving a ball at two o'clock in the morning, defended himself against three ruffians on the Boulevard des Invalids; without even taking his gloves off, he had rid himself of the first two ruffians by butting them with his head in the stomach, and had led the third by the ear to the police-station. Ah! what a fist! It was a pity he was an aristocrat.

"Listen to this, now," continued Lantier. "I pass on to some news of high life. The Countess de Bretigny has arranged to marry her eldest daughter to the young Baron de Valancay, aide-de-camp to His Majesty. The wedding trousseau will contain more than three hundred thousand francs' worth of lace."

"What's that to us?" interrupted Bibi-the-Smoker. "We don't want to know about her clothes. The girl can have no end of lace, nevertheless she'll see the moon through the same peep-hole as other people."

As Lantier seemed about to finish his reading, Salted-Mouth, *alias* Drink-without-Thirst, took the newspaper from him, and sat upon it saying,—

“Ah! no, that’s enough! Look here! That paper’s only good for this.”

Meanwhile, Mes-Bottes, who had been looking at his hand of the game, triumphantly banged his fist down on the table. He scored ninety-three.

“I’ve the Revolution,” shouted he. “A quint in clubs. Down in the grass with the cows! That’s twenty, isn’t it? Then tierce major in diamonds, twenty-three; three kings, twenty-six; three jacks, twenty-nine; three aces, ninety-two. And I play year one of the Republic, ninety-three.”

“Your game’s up, old man,” cried the others to Coupeau.

They ordered two fresh bottles. The glasses were filled up again as fast as they were emptied, the fuddle increased. Towards five o’clock, it began to become disgusting, so much so, that Lantier kept very quiet, thinking of how to slip away from the others; brawling and chucking the wine about was no longer to his fancy. Just then Coupeau stood up to make the drunkard’s sign of the cross. Touching his head, he pronounced Montpernasse, then Menilmonte as he brought his hand to his right shoulder, La Courtille moving it to his left shoulder, Bagnolet as he gave himself a blow in the chest, and wound up by saying, “stewed rabbit” three times as he hit himself in the stomach. Then, the latter took advantage of the clamour which greeted the completion of this feat, and quietly made for the door. His comrades did not even notice his going off. He had already had a pretty good supply. But once outside, he shook himself and regained his self-possession; and he quietly made for the shop, where he told Gervaise that Coupeau was with some friends.

Two days passed away. The zinc-worker had not returned. He was knocking about the neighbourhood,

but no one knew exactly where. Several persons, however, declared they had seen him at mother Baquet's at the "Butterfly," and at the "Little old Man with a Cough." Only, some stated that he was alone, whilst others affirmed that he was along with seven or eight drunkards like himself. Gervaise shrugged her shoulders with an air of resignation. Good heavens! all that was required was to get used to it. She never ran about after her husband; she even went out of her way, if she caught a glance of him inside a wine-shop, so as not to enrage him; and she waited at home till he returned, listening at night time to hear lest he might be snoring outside the door. He would sleep on a rubbish-heap, or on a seat, or on a bit of waste land, or across a gutter. The next day, after having only badly slept off his fuddle of the day before, he would start off again, knocking at the doors of all the consolation dealers, plunging anew into a furious wandering, in the midst of drops of brandy, glasses of wine, losing his friends and then finding them again, going regular voyages, from which he returned in a state of stupor, seeing the streets dance, the night fall, and the day break, without any other idea than to drink and sleep off the effects wherever he happened to be. When in the latter state, the world had come to an end, so far as he was concerned. On the second day, however, Gervaise went to old Colombe's Assommoir, to find out something about him; he had been there another five times, they were unable to tell her anything more. All she could do was to take away his tools, which he had left under a seat.

In the evening, Lantier, seeing that the laundress seemed very worried, offered to take her to a café-concert, just by way of passing a pleasant hour. She refused at first, she was in no frame of mind for laughing. Otherwise, she would not have said "no," for the hatter made the proposal in too honourable looking a manner for her to feel any mistrust. He seemed to feel for her in quite a paternal way. Never before had Coupeau

slept out two nights together. So that, in spite of herself, she would go every ten minutes to the door, with her iron in her hand, and look up and down the street to see if her husband was coming. It made her legs tingle, so she said, in such a way that she could not stand still. Coupeau might very likely get a leg broken, or fall under some vehicle and stay there: it would be a good riddance, and she constrained herself from entertaining the least affection in her heart for such a disgraceful man. But it was becoming most annoying, never knowing whether he would return or whether he would not. And when the gas lamps were lit, as Lantier again proposed the cafe-concert, she accepted his proposal. After all, she would have been very stupid to refuse a pleasure, when, for the past three days, her husband had been doing nothing but lead a dog's life. As he did not return home, she too would go out. The place might burn down if it liked. She was ready to set the concern ablaze herself, for the troubles of life were beginning to fill her with disgust.

They ate their dinner quickly. Then, when she went off at eight o'clock, arm-in-arm with the hatter, Gervaise told mother Coupeau and Nana to go to bed at once. The shop was closed. She left by the door opening into the courtyard, and gave Madame Boche the key, asking her, if her pig came home, to have the kindness to put it to bed. The hatter was waiting for her under the big doorway, dressed in his best, and whistling a tune. She had on her silk dress. They walked slowly along the pavement, keeping tightly by each other, while the glare from the shop windows showed them smiling and talking together in a low voice.

The cafe-concert hall was in the Boulevard de Rochechouart; it had originally been a little cafe, and had been enlarged by means of a kind of wooden shed set up in the courtyard. At the door a string of glass globes composed a luminous porch. Tall posters pasted on boards stood upon the ground, close to the gutter.

"Here we are," said Lantier. "To-night, first appearance of Mademoiselle Amanda, serio-comic."

But at this moment he caught sight of Bibi-the Smoker, who was also perusing the poster. Bibi had a black eye; some knock he had got the day before.

"Well! where's Coupeau?" inquired the hatter, looking all round about. "Have you, then, lost Coupeau?"

"Oh! that's long ago, since yesterday," replied the other. "There was a turn of fisticuffs on leaving mother Baquet's. I don't care for these fights. We had a row, you know, with mother Baquet's potboy, because he wanted to make us pay for a quart twice over. Then I hooked it. I went and had a bit of a nap."

He was still gaping; he had slept ten hours at a stretch. He was, moreover, quite sobered, with a stupefied look on his face, and his jacket smothered with wool-hairs; for he had no doubt tumbled into bed with his clothes on.

"And you don't know where my husband is, sir?" asked the laundress.

"Well, no, not the least. It was five o'clock when we left mother Baquet's. That's all I can tell you. Perhaps he went down the street. Yes, I fancy now that I saw him go into the 'Butterfly' with a coachman. Oh! how stupid it is! Really we deserve to be shot!"

Lantier and Gervaise spent a very pleasant evening at the music-hall. At eleven o'clock, when the place shut up, they dawdled home without hurrying themselves. It was rather chilly, the spectators went off in little groups, and there were some girls splitting with laughter in the shadow under the trees, because of the jokes of their male friends. Lantier sang one of Mademoiselle Amanda's songs between his teeth: "It's in the nose that it tickles me." Gervaise feeling giddy, as if intoxicated, took up the chorus. She had felt very warm at the concert. Then the two drinks she had had, together with the tobacco smoke, and the odour of all

those people crowded together, made her feel queer. But she took away with her a very lively impression of Mademoiselle Amanda. She would never herself have dared to appear before the public in such a scanty garb. But to be just, the lady had a skin to be envied. And she listened with a sensual curiosity, whilst Lantier gave some details about the person in question, with the air of a man who counted her ribs one by one.

"Every one's asleep," said Gervaise, after ringing three times, without the Boches opening the door.

At length the door opened, but the porch was very dark inside, and when she knocked at the window of the doorkeeper's room to ask for her key, the doorkeeper, who was half asleep, called out some confused words, which she could at first make nothing of. She evidently understood that Poisson, the policeman, had brought Coupeau home in a horrible condition, and that the key was doubtless in the lock.

"Ugh!" murmured Lantier, when they had entered, "whatever has he been up to here? The stench is abominable."

A pretty spectacle met their gaze, when Gervaise, who had been looking about for the matches, at last lit a candle. Coupeau appeared to have been fearfully sick and ill; the bed, as well as the carpet, was plastered over with unpleasantness. Besides that he had fallen from the bed, where Poisson had probably thrown him, and was snoring on the floor in the midst of the dirt like a pig wallowing in the mire, exhaling his foul breath through his open mouth.

"Oh! the pig! the pig!" repeated Gervaise, indignant and exasperated. "He's spoiled everything. No, a dog wouldn't have done that, a dead dog is cleaner."

Never before had the zinc worker come home in such a state. The sight was a great shock to the affection his wife still had for him. In the earlier times, when he returned slightly elevated or tipsy, she showed herself kind, and in no way disgusted. But this time it was too

much, her heart revolted against it. She would not have taken hold of him with a pair of tongs. Her whole nature was in revolt.

"I must, however, get into bed," murmured she. "I can't return and sleep in the street. Oh, I'll sooner pass over his body."

She tried to step over the drunkard, but had to catch hold of a corner of the chest of drawers to save herself from slipping in the filth. Coupeau completely blocked the way to the bed. Then Lantier, who had a little laugh to himself on seeing that she certainly would not lay her head on her own pillow that night, took hold of her hand, saying in a low and ardent voice,—

"Gervaise ; listen, Gervaise."

But she had understood. She freed herself, and in her bewilderment addressed him familiarly as long ago.—

"No, leave me. I implore you, Auguste, go to your own room. I shall arrange ; I shall lie at the foot of the bed."

"Come, Gervaise, don't be a fool," resumed he. "It's too disgusting ; you can't remain here. Come. What are you afraid of ? he can't hear us !"

She struggled, she energetically said "No." In her confusion, as though to show that she intended to remain there, she began to undress herself, throwing her silk gown on to a chair, and suddenly appearing all white in her petticoat and chemise, her throat and arms bare. Her bed was her own, was it not ? she would certainly sleep in her bed. Twice again she endeavoured to find a clear space to enable her to reach it. But Lantier did not give in, and kept seizing her round the waist, saying all sorts of things to put fire in her blood. Ah ! she was nicely placed, with a crapulous husband in front who prevented her getting respectably under her blanket, and a scoundrel of a man behind, whose only thought was to take advantage of her misfortune to make her his own again ! As the latter raised his voice, she begged him to keep quiet. And she listened, her ear bent towards the

little room where Nana and mother Coupeau slept. The child and the old woman were no doubt asleep, for one could hear a heavy breathing. •

"Auguste, leave me, you'll wake them," said she, clasping her hands together. "Be reasonable. Go away—go away—think of my daughter."

He no longer spoke, he remained smiling; and he slowly kissed her on the ear, the same as he used to do to tease and stupify her. Then her strength deserted her, she felt a great buzzing in her ears, a violent tremor passed through her body. Yet, she advanced another step forward. And she was again forced to draw back. It was not possible, the disgust was so great, the stench had become such that she could not have lain in her own blankets without abomination reaching her. Coupeau, overpowered intoxication, lying as comfortably as though on a bed of down, was sleeping off his "drunk," without life in his limbs, and with his mouth all on one side. The whole street might have entered and kissed his wife without a hair of his body moving.

"So much the worse," stammered she; "it's his fault, I cannot do it. Ah! my God! ah! my God! he drives me from my bed, I've no longer a bed. No, I cannot, it's his fault."

She trembled, she lost her head. And whilst Lantier was pushing her before him, Nana's face appeared behind one of the panes of the glass door of her chamber. The child had just awoke, pale with sleep, and quietly got up in her night-gown. She looked at her father sprawling in his vomit; then pressing close to the pane, she remained there waiting till her mother's white petticoat had disappeared inside the other man's room opposite. She was quite grave. Her eyes were opened wide like a vicious child's, and lit up with an unearthly curiosity.

CHAPTER IX

THAT winter, mother Coupeau nearly went off in one of her coughing fits. Each year, in the month of December, she could count on her asthma laying her on her back for two or three weeks at a time. She was fifteen no longer, she would be seventy-three on Saint Anthony's day. With that, she was very rickety, often troubled with a rattling in the throat for nothing at all, though she was plump and stout. The doctor said she would go off while coughing, just having time to say,—“Good-night, Jeanneton, the candle's out!”

When she was in her bed, mother Coupeau became positively unendurable. It is true though that the little room in which she slept with Nana was not at all gay. Between her bedstead and the child's there was just room to place a couple of chairs. The wall-paper, an old faded grey one, hung in shreds. The little round window close to the ceiling merely admitted the pale, doubtful light, like that of a cellar. One soon grew old in there, especially a person who could scarcely breathe. At night time, when unable to sleep herself, she would listen to the child's breathing, and that kept her a little from thinking. But, in the day-time, as there was nobody to keep her company from morning to night, she grumbled, and cried, and repeated to herself for hours together, as she rolled her head on the pillow,—

“Good heavens! what a miserable creature I am! Good heavens! what a miserable creature I am! They'll leave me to die in prison, yes in prison!”

And as soon as anybody called, Virginie or Madame Boche, to ask for her health, she would not answer, but immediately started on her chapter of complaints.

"Ah! the bread which I eat here is dear indeed! No, I could not suffer so much were I amongst strangers! Look you, I wanted a cup of herb tea, well! they brought me a water-jug full, just a way of reproaching me for drinking too much of it. It's the same with Nana, that child whom I have brought up, she goes off barefooted in the morning, and I don't see her again all day. Yet, at night-time, she sleeps pretty soundly, and doesn't once wake up to ask me if I'm in pain. In short, I'm in their way, they're waiting for me to hook it. Oh! it won't take long. I've no longer a son, that besom of a laundress has taken him from me. She would beat me, she would finish me off, if she were not afraid of the police."

Gervaise was indeed rather rough at times. The place was turning out badly, everyone's temper was getting spoilt, and they quarrelled with each other for the least word. Coupeau, one morning that he had got his hair out of curl, exclaimed:—"The old thing's always saying she's going to die, and yet she never does!" words which struck mother Coupeau to the heart. They reproached her with what she cost, they coolly said that it would be a great economy if she were no longer there. To tell the truth, she did not behave as she should have done. For instance, whenever she saw her eldest daughter, Madame Lerat, she complained of her poverty-stricken condition, accusing her son and her daughter-in-law of leaving her to starve, and when she had cajoled her out of a twenty sou piece, she would spend it in sweatmeats. She also told the Lorilleux some abominable stories, relating that the laundress spent their ten francs in indulging all sorts of fancies of her own, new caps, cakes eaten in sly corners; and worse things which it would not do to mention. On two or three occasions, she almost caused a general fight amongst the family.

At one moment she was on this side and the next moment she was on that; in short the household was getting into a dreadfully confused state.

When at her worst, that winter, one afternoon when Madame Lorilleux and Madame Lerat had met at her bedside, mother Coupeau winked her eye as a signal to them to lean over her. She could hardly speak. She rather hissed than said in a low voice,—

"It's becoming decent! I heard them last night. Yes, yes, the Hobbler and the hatter and they were going on so! Coupeau's a nice one. It is decent indeed!"

And she told, in short sentences, coughing and choking between each, how her son had probably come home dead drunk the night before. Then as she was not asleep, she was easily able to account for all the noises, the Hobbler's bare feet tripping over the tiled floor, the hissing voice of the hatter calling to her, the door between the two rooms gently closed, and all the rest. It must have gone on till daylight, she could not tell the precise time, because, in spite of her efforts, she had ended by falling into a doze.

"What's most disgusting is, that Nana might have heard," continued the old woman. "She was indeed restless all the night, she who usually sleeps so sound; she tossed about, and kept turning over, as if there had been some lighted charcoal in her bed."

The other two women did not seem at all astonished.

"Of course!" murmured Madame Lorilleux, "it very likely began the very first night he came here. But as it pleases Coupeau, we've no business to interfere. All the same, it's not very respectable for the family."

"If I were there," exclaimed Madame Lerat, screwing up her mouth, "I would give her such a fright, I'd cry out something, no matter what: 'I see you!' or better still, 'Police!' A doctor's servant once told me that her master had told her that such a thing at a certain moment might kill a woman on the spot. If so, it would

serve her right; she would be punished where she had sinned."

All the neighbourhood soon knew that every night Gervaise went and joined Lantier.

Before the neighbours Madame Lorilleux was noisily indignant; she pitied her brother, that fool who was made drunk by his wife from head to toe; and, according to her, if she continued to visit at such a place, it was solely on account of her poor mother, who was obliged to live in the midst of these abominations. Then the whole district fell upon Gervaise. It was she who had led the hatter astray. You could see it in her eyes. Yes, in spite of the dreadful rumours, that sly fellow Lantier remained on his pedestal, because he continued to behave towards everyone like a highly respectable person, walking along the pavement reading his newspaper, attentive and gallant with the ladies, always having sweets and flowers to give away. Goodness gracious! he merely continued to act his part; a man is a man, one cannot ask him to resist women who throw themselves at him. But there was no excuse for her; she was a disgrace to the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. And the Lorilleux, in their capacity of godfather and godmother, enticed Nana to their rooms for the purpose of getting the details out of her. When they questioned her in a round-about way, the child put on her stupid air, hiding the fire of her eyes with her long soft lashes as she replied to them.

In the midst of this general indignation, Gervaise lived quietly on, feeling worried and half asleep. At first, she considered herself very guilty, very low, and she had a disgust for herself. Each time she quitted Lantier's room, she washed her hands, she wetted a dish-cloth and rubbed her shoulders almost till they bled, as though to wipe off the stain. If Coupeau then tried to joke, she would get quite angry, and run and shivering dress herself in the farthest corner of the shop; neither would she allow the hatter to touch her soon

after her husband had kissed her. She merely tried to arrange things in such a way that no one should be troubled too much.

After all, she could not be doing anything so very wrong, since affairs were arranged so easily to the general satisfaction; one is usually punished if one does that what is not right. So her dissoluteness had slowly turned into a habit. Now, it was as regular an affair as eating and drinking; each time that Coupeau came home drunk, she retired to Lantier's room, and that happened at least on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday every week. She divided her nights. She had even got so far as to leave the zinc-worker in the middle of his sleep if he merely snored too loud, and going and finishing her quiet nap on her neighbour's pillow. It was not that she felt any greater affection for the latter. No, she merely found him cleaner, she rested better in his room, where she felt as if taking a bath. In short, she resembled those she-cats which like to curl themselves up on the clean white clothes.

Mother Coupeau never dared speak of it quite openly. But, after a quarrel, when the laundress had scolded her, the old woman was not sparing in her allusions. She would say that she knew men who were tremendous fools, and women who were precious bad ones; and she would mutter words far from biting, with the sharpness of language peculiar to an old waistcoat-maker. The first time this had happened, Gervaise looked at her straight in the face, without replying. Then, also avoiding going into details, she began to defend herself with arguments given in a general sort of way. When a woman had a drunkard for a husband, a pig who lived in dirt, that woman was to be excused if she tried to find cleanliness somewhere else. She went farther than this; she let it to be understood that Lantier was as much her husband as Coupeau, perhaps more so. Had she not known him from the time she was fourteen years of age? Had she not had two children by him? Well! in such

conditions, everything was pardonable, no one had a right to cast stones at her. Besides, she would not stand being badgered by anyone. She would precious soon give them all a bit of her mind. The Rue de la Goutte-d'Or was not such a very virtuous place! And, with a broad gesture, she took in the whole neighbourhood; it would require an hour merely to display the dirty linen of all those people.

She would exclaim, whenever anybody especially enraged her: "Everyone for himself, is it not so? They should let other people live in their own way, if they wish to do so in theirs. For myself, I'm agreeable to everything so long as I'm not dragged through the gutter by people who have already plunged into it head first."

The next day, Goujet having called about his mother's washing when Gervaise happened to be out, mother Coupeau called him to her and kept him some time seated beside her bed. She knew all about the blacksmith's friendship, and had observed that for some time past he had looked dismal and wretched, from a suspicion of the things that were going on. So, for the sake of gossiping, and out of revenge for a quarrel of the day before, she told him the truth flatly, weeping and grumbling as though Gervaise's wicked behaviour did her some special harm. When Goujet quitted the little room, he leant against the wall, almost choking with grief. Then, when the laundress returned home, mother Coupeau called to her that Madame Goujet wanted her to go round with her clothes, ironed or not; and she was so animated that Gervaise, seeing something was wrong, guessed what had taken place, and had a presentiment of the misery which awaited her.

Very pale, her limbs already trembling, she placed the things in a basket and started off. For years past she had not paid back the Goujets a sou of their money. The debt still amounted to four hundred and twenty-five francs. She always spoke of her embarrassments and received the money for the washing. It filled her with

shame, because she seemed to be taking advantage of the blacksmith's friendship to make a fool of him. She would not allow anyone to say a word against Goujet before her; her affection for the blacksmith remained like a last shred of her honour. Thus, every time she took the washing back to those worthy people, she felt a catching at her heart the moment she put a foot on their stairs.

"Ah! it's you, at last!" said Madame Goujet, sharply, on opening the door to her. "When I'm in want of death, I'll send you to fetch him."

Gervaise entered, greatly put out by this speech, not even daring to mutter an excuse. She was no longer punctual, never came at the time fixed, and would keep her customer waiting for days at a time. Little by little she was giving way to a system of complete disorder.

"For a week past I've been looking for you," the lacemender went on. "And you tell falsehoods, too; you send your apprentice to me with all sorts of stories; you are then busy with my things, you will send them on the same evening, or else you've had an accident, the bundle's fallen into a bucket of water. Whilst all this is going on, I waste my time, nothing arrives, and it worries me exceedingly. No, you're very unreasonable. Let us see, now, what have you in your basket? Is everything there now? Have you brought me the pair of sheets you've been keeping by you for a month past, and the shirt which was wanting the last time you brought home the washing?"

"Yes, yes," murmured Gervaise, "the shirt is there. Here it is."

But Madame Goujet cried out. That shirt was not hers; she would not have it. Her things were altered now; it was shameful. Only the week before, there were two handkerchiefs which hadn't her mark on them. She didn't like to have clothes coming from no one knew where. Besides that, she liked to have her own things.

"And the sheets?" she resumed. "They're lost, I

suppose. Well, young woman, you must arrange about them, for I insist upon having them to-morrow morning, do you hear?"

Then silence ensued. What completed Gervaise's embarrassment was the knowledge that behind her, the door of Goujet's room was ajar. The blacksmith was no doubt inside; she felt that he was there; and how annoying, if he was listening to all those deserved reproaches, to which she could reply nothing! She became very submissive and gentle, bowing her head as she placed the clean linen on the bed as quickly as possible. But matters became worse when Madame Goujet began to examine the things one by one. She took hold of them and threw them down again, saying,—

"Ah! you don't do them half so nicely as you used to do. One can't compliment you every day now. Yes, you've taken to scamp your work—doing it in a most slovenly way. Just look at this shirt-front; it's scorched; there's the mark of the iron on the plaits; and the bottoms have all been torn off. I don't know how you manage it, but there's never a button left now on anything. Oh; now, here's a petticoat body which I shall certainly not pay you for. Look there! The dirt's still on it; you've simply smoothed it over. Why the things now are not even clean."

She stopped whilst she counted the different articles. Then she exclaimed,—

"What! this is all you've brought? There are wanting two pairs of stockings, six towels, a table-cloth, and several cloths. You're regularly making fun of me, it seems. I sent word that you were to bring me everything, ironed or not. If your apprentice isn't here in an hour with the rest of the things, we shall quarrel, Madame Coupeau, I warn you."

At this moment Goujet coughed in his room. Gervaise slightly started. How she was treated before him good heavens! And she remained standing in the middle of the room stupid and confused, and waiting

for the soiled clothes ; but, after checking the account, Madame Goujet had quietly returned to her seat near the window, and resumed the mending of a lace shawl.

"And the soiled things?" timidly inquired the laundress.

"No, thank you," replied the old woman, "there's nothing this week."

Gervaise turned pale. This customer, then, had withdrawn. Then she quite lost her head ; she was obliged to sit down on a chair, for her legs were giving way under her. And she did not even seek to justify herself. All that she could find to say was,—

"Is Monsieur Goujet ill?"

Yes, he was not well. He had been obliged to come home instead of returning to the forge, and he had gone to lie down on his bed to get a rest. Madame Goujet talked sadly, wearing her black dress as usual, and her white face framed in her monachal cap. They had again brought down the wages of the bolt-makers. From nine francs they had fallen to seven in consequence of the machinery, which now did almost all the work. And she explained that they were obliged to economise in everything in future, she intended to do the washing herself as formerly. It would naturally have been very fortunate in these circumstances, if the Coupeaus had been able to repay her the money lent them by her son ; but she was not going to set the lawyers on them, as they were unable to pay. Since she began speaking of the debt, Gervaise, with bowed head, seemed to be following the skilful play of the old lady's needle as it gathered up the meshes of the net-work one by one.

"All the same," the lace-mender went on to say, "by pinching yourselves a little, you could contrive to pay it off. For the fact is, now, you live very well ; you spend a great deal, I'm sure. If you were only to pay off, say, ten francs a month——"

She was interrupted by Goujet's voice, as he called out,—

"Mother! mother!"

And when she returned to her seat, which was almost at once, she changed the conversation. The blacksmith had no doubt begged her not to ask Gervaise for money; but, in spite of herself, she again referred to the debt at the expiration of five minutes. Oh! she had seen beforehand what was happening—the zinc-worker was drinking up the shop, and he would lead his wife to ruin. Had her son only listened to her, he would never have lent the five hundred francs. He would have married, now he would not have been bursting with sadness, nor had the prospect of being wretched for the rest of his life. She was becoming excited, and likewise very harsh, plainly charging Gervaise with having arranged with Coupeau to take advantage of her foolish son. Yes, there were women who wore the mask of hypocrisy for years, and whose evil character in the end was displayed in the light of the day.

"Mother! mother!" again called Goujet, but louder this time.

She rose from her seat, and when she came back, she said, as she resumed her lace mending,—

"Go in, he wishes to see you."

Gervaise, all trembling, left the door open. This scene filled her with emotion, because it seemed like an avowal of their affection before Madame Goujet. She once more beheld the quiet little chamber, with its narrow iron bedstead, and papered all over with pictures, the whole looking like the room of some young fellow of fifteen. Goujet's big body was stretched on the bed. Mother Coupeau's disclosures seemed to have knocked all the life out of his limbs. His eyes were quite red and swollen, his beautiful yellow beard was still wet. In the first instant of rage, he must have pegged away at his pillow with his terrible fists, for the ticking was split, and the feathers were coming out.

"Listen, mother's wrong," said he to the laundress, in

a voice that was hardly audible. "You owe me nothing, I won't have that affair spoken of."

He had raised himself up, and was looking at her. Big tears at once rose to his eyes.

"Do you suffer, Monsieur Goujet?" murmured she.

"What is the matter with you? Do tell me."

"Nothing, thanks. I fatigued myself too much yesterday. I will sleep a bit."

Then, his heart breaking, he said he could not keep back this cry,—

"Ah my God! my God! it was never to be—never. You swore it. And now it is—it is! Ah my God! it pains me too bitterly—leave me."

And with his hand he gently and imploringly motioned to her to go. She did not come nearer to the bed. She went off as he had asked her too, feeling stupefied, and unable to say anything to comfort him. When in the other room, she took up her basket; but she did not leave at once. She stood there trying to find something to say. Madame Goujet continued her mending without raising her head. It was she who at last said,—

"Well, good-night; sent me back my things; we will settle up afterwards."

"Yes, that will be best. Good-night," stammered Gervaise.

She closed the door slowly, with a last glance at that clean, tidy home, where she seemed to be leaving behind her a part of her respectability. She returned to the shop in the stupid manner of cows returning to their shed, without troubling themselves as to the way. Mother Coupeau, who had left her bed for the first time, was seated on a chair beside the big stove. But the laundress did not even utter a solitary reproach. She was too tired, her bones ached as though she had been beaten. She was reflecting that life was indeed too cruel, and that one could not tear one's heart out without killing oneself right off. ' "

After this, Gervaise became careless about everything. With a vague gesture of her hand she would send everybody away to their own concerns. At each fresh annoyance she buried herself deeper in her only pleasure, which was to have her three meals a day. The shop might have collapsed. So long as she was not beneath it, she would have gone off quite quietly without anything. And the shop was breaking up, not suddenly, but little by little morning and evening. One by one the customers got annoyed, and sent their washing elsewhere. M. Madinier, Mademoisele Ramanjou, the Boches themselves had gone back again to Madame Fauconnier, where they could count on greater exactness. Ah, well! the whole district might withdraw its custom, it would rid her of a fine heap of unpleasantness. Besides that, too, it would be so much work the less. Meanwhile, she merely retained the customers who paid badly. The shop was lost. She had had to part with her workwoman, Madame Putois; and she was left alone with her apprentice, that squint-eyed Augustine, who became all the more stupid the bigger she grew. Yet the pair of them had not even then always enough of work. They would sit on their stools doing nothing for entire afternoons. In short, it was a regular plunge in the mire. It meant absolute ruin.

Whilst idleness and poverty entered, at the same time dirtiness naturally entered also. One would never have recognised that beautiful blue shop, the colour of heaven, which had once been Gervaise's pride. But Gervaise had not observed the shop getting dirty; she abandoned herself to it, and grew accustomed to the torn wall paper, the greasy wood-work, the same as she got into the way of wearing torn skirts and of no longer washing her ears. To leave things to take care of themselves, to wait till the dust stopped up all the holes and covered everything with a coat of velvet, and to feel the house become heavy around her in the irresistible laziness, was a voluptuous pleasure which intoxicated her.

Her own ease was her first thought ; she did not care a sou for anything else. The debts, though still increasing, no longer vexed her. Her good name among the shopkeepers gradually deserted her ; whether she would be able to pay or not was altogether uncertain, and she preferred not to know. When her credit was stopped at one shop, she would open an account at some other near it. She was in debt all over the neighbourhood ; she owed money every few yards. To take only the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or, she no longer dared pass in front of the grocer's, nor the charcoal-dealer's nor the green-grocer's ; and this obliged her, whenever she needed to go to the wash-house, to go round by the Rue des Poissonniers, which was quite ten minutes out of her way. The tradespeople came and treated her as a swindler. One evening, the man who had sold them the furniture for Lantier, drew all the neighbours round the place ; he yelled out that he would put her in prison if she did not come out with his money. Such scenes, of course, left her all in a tremble ; still, she would shake herself like a dog that had been beaten, and there was an end of it. She did not dine any the worse that evening. They were a lot of insolent scoundrels to come troubling her. She had no money ; she could not make any, could she ? Besides, the tradespeople robbed people quite enough ; they were made to wait. And she would fall asleep in her hole, trying not to dream of what was sure to occur one day. She would take the leap, goodness knows ; but, until then, she was determined not to be annoyed.

Meanwhile mother Coupeau had recovered. For another year the household rubbed along. During the summer months there was naturally a little more work—the white petticoats and the cambric dresses of the swell girls of the exterior Boulevard. However, the catastrophe was slowly approaching ; the home sank deeper into the mire every week ; there were ups and downs, however—evenings when they had to have potatoes and point, and

others when they ate veal enough to make them burst. Mother Coupeau was for ever being seen in the street concealing bundles under her apron, and strolling in the direction of the pawnshop in the Rue Polonceau. She marched along with the air of a devotee going to mass, for she did not dislike these errands; haggling about money amused her; this crying up of her wares like a secondhand dealer tickled her old woman's fancy. The clerks in the Rue Polonceau knew her well; they called her mother "Four Francs," because she always asked for four francs when they offered her three on her bundles as large as two sous' worth of butter. Gervaise would willingly have pawned the whole place; she was seized with a mania for putting everything in pawn; she would have had her head shaved, if she could have got anything lent to her on her hair. It was too convenient; one could not resist sending there for money when one was in want of a four-pound loaf. Every stitch of clothing found its way there—the linen, the coats, even the tools and the furniture. At first she took advantage of the good weeks to get the things out again, even though she had to send them back the week after. Then she ceased crying for her things, and either let the tickets run out or sold them.

One thing alone gave her a pang—it was having to pawn her clock to pay an acceptance for twenty francs to a bailiff who had come to seize her goods. Until then, she had sworn to die of hunger sooner than to part with her clock. And when mother Coupeau carried it away in a little bonnet-box, she sunk on to a chair, her arms quite nerveless, her eyes full of tears, as though a fortune was being taken away from her. But when mother Coupeau reappeared with twenty-five francs, the unexpected loan, the five francs profit comforted her; she at once sent the old woman out again for four sous' worth of brandy in a glass, only to toast the five-franc piece. Often now, whenever they were agreeable together, they would share a drink on a corner of the work-table,

generally a mixture, half brandy and half cassis. Mother Coupeau had a trick of bringing back the glass brimful in the pocket of her apron without spilling a drop. There was no necessity that the neighbours should know, was there? The truth was that the neighbours knew perfectly well. The greengrocer, the tripe-seller, the grocer's men would say to each other: "Hallo! the old woman's off to my uncle's," or else: "Hallo! the old woman's bringing her drop in her pocket." And that naturally made everyone angry with Gervaise. She swallowed up everything; she would soon finish up her house. Yes, yes, only three or four more mouthfuls, and it would be as bare as a moor.

In the midst of this general demolishment, Coupeau continued to prosper. The desperate soaker seemed to bear a charm. The sour wine and the "vitriol" positively fattened him. He eat a great deal, and laughed at that stick of a Lorilleux, who accused drink of killing people, and replied to him by slapping himself on the stomach, the skin of which was stretched by the fat like the skin of a drum. He would play him a tune on it, the glutton's vespers, with rolls and beats loud enough to have made a quack's fortune. But Lorilleux, vexed at having himself no stomach to speak of, said that it was yellow fat, which was a bad kind. Nevertheless, Coupeau got more drunk than ever, for the sake of his health. His pepper and salt hair, waving about his head, was like the ashes of a fire-brand. His drunkard's face, with its mokey-shaped jaw, was becoming coloured like a pipe, assuming the tinge of purple wine. And he remained a child of gaiety; he conducted himself roughly to his wife, whenever she ventured to tell him of her embarrassments. Were men made to have to do with such troublesome matters? The cupboard might be in want of bread, that was nothing to him. He required his fill morning and evening, and he never vexed himself as to where it came from. When he allowed weeks to go by without doing a single turn of work he became more exacting still. At

the same time he continued to give Lantier friendly slaps on the shoulder. He was certainly in ignorance of his wife's misconduct—at least, many persons, the Boches, the Poissons, swore by all that was holy that he had not the remotest suspicion, and that something dreadful would happen should he ever become aware of it. But his own sister, Madame Lerat, shook her head, and related that she knew some husbands who had no objection whatever to such a state of things. One night Gervaise herself, who was coming from the hatter's room, shivered with fright on receiving a knock from behind in the dark; but she ended by reassuring herself, convinced that she had come in contact with the frame-work of the bedstead. Really, the situation was too terrible; her husband could not be amusing himself by playing such jokes upon her.

There was no failing in Lantier either. He was very careful of himself, measuring his body by the waistband of his trousers, with the continual dread of having to loosen the buckle or draw it tighter; he considered himself just right, and out of conceit neither wished to grow fatter or thinner. That made him hard to please as to his food, for he regarded every dish from the point of view of keeping his shape as it was. Even when there was not a penny in the house, he required eggs, cutlets, light and nourishing things. He picked up any twenty-sou pieces which happened to be lying about, made Gervaise obey his smallest behests, grumbled, yelled, and had more the appearance of being at home than the zinc-worker himself. In fact, it was a house that had two masters. And the chance one, who was the more cunning, took the best share of everything, of the wife, the food, and the rest of it. He was taking the cream off the Coupeaus, that was all! He no longer took the trouble to churn his butter on the quiet, but did it in public. Nana continued to be his favourite, because he liked nice little girls. He concerned himself less and less about Etienne; boys, according to him, should know how to get along by themselves. Whenever anyone

called and asked for Coupeau, he was always certain to find the hatter there, in his slippers and his shirt sleeves, coming out of the back shop with the annoyed look of a husband who has been disturbed: and he would answer for Coupeau, as he said it was all the same.

Between these two gentlemen, Gervaise did not laugh every day. She had nothing to complain of as to her health, thank goodness! She also was growing too fat. But two men to look after and satisfy was often more than she could manage. The worst was that they got on very well together, the rascals. They never quarrelled; they would chuckle in each other's faces, as they sat in the evenings after dinner, their elbows on the table; they would rub up against one another all the live long day, like cats which seek and cultivate their pleasure. On the days when they came home in a rage, she was the sufferer. Go it! hammer away at the poor beast! She had a strong back; it made them all the better friends when they yelled together. And it never did for her to give them tit-for-tat.

At first when, one shouted, she would implore the other with a look, to obtain his good word. Only, it seldom succeeded. She bore it meekly now, she bent her fat shoulders, as if she comprehended that it amused them to jostle her about, she was so round, a regular ball. Coupeau, who was grown very coarse, treated her to some abominable language. Lantier, on the contrary, chose his insults, seeking for words which no one else made use of, and which wounded her far more. Fortunately, one gets accustomed to everything; the bad words, the injustice of the two men ended by gliding off her smooth skin as if it had been oil cloth. Then they would ask her for dainty dishes, she was to salt and not to salt, say white and say black, nurse them, and put them to sleep one after the other in cotton wool. At the end of the week her head was splitting, and her limbs half-broken, her brain was quite stupefied, and her eyes were like a lunatic's. Such an existence, soon uses up a woman.

Yes, Coupeau and Lantier were wearing her out, that was the word; they were burning her at both ends, as one says of a candle. The zinc-worker, sure enough, lacked education; but the hatter had too much, or at least he had education in a way to make knowledge offensive. One night she dreamt that she was on the edge of a well; Coupeau was pushing her into it with a blow of his fist, whilst Lantier was tickling her to make her fall quicker. Well! that was just like her life. Ah! she was at a good school; it was not at all surprising if she fell lower and lower. The people of the district were not quite just when they reproached her for the bad ways she was getting into, for her misfortune was not of her making. At times, when she lost herself in reflection, a shiver ran through her body. Then she would think that things might have turned out worse than they had. In fact, in spite of the debts, in spite of the poverty which threatened them, she would have confessed herself to be very comfortable, and very content, if the zinc-worker and the hatter had worked and scolded her a trifle less.

Towards the autumn, unhappily, things became worse. Lantier pretended he was getting thinner, and pulled a longer face over the state of things every day. He grumbled at everything, sniffed at the dishes of potatoes—a mess he could not eat, he would say, without having the colic. The least bickering now turned to quarrels, in which they accused one another of being the cause of all their troubles, and it was the very devil to restore harmony before they all retired for the night. When there is no more bran, the donkeys fight together. Lantier scented the destitution which was approaching; it exasperated him to find that the place was nearly all caten up, so completely cleaned out, that he foresaw the day when he would need to take his hat and seek for a nest and his food elsewhere. He had become thoroughly accustomed to his den, having formed little habits there and been coddled by everyone; a regular land of plenty, the delights of which he would never be able to replace.

Alas! one cannot stuff oneself up to one's ears and still have the piece on one's plate. Really, the Coupeaus were not very broad-backed. And then he maintained that Gervaise was not sufficiently economical. Thunder of Heaven! what was going to become of them all? His friends were failing him just as he was on the point of concluding a splendid stroke of business, six thousand francs salary in a manufactory, sufficient to enable the little family to lead a life of luxury.

One evening in December they dined with "Duke Humphrey." There was not a radish left. Lantier who was very solemn, went out early, wandering about in search of some other den where the smell of the kitchen would bring a smile to his face. He would now remain for hours beside the stove wrapt in thought. Then, suddenly, he began to get up a great friendship for the Poissons. He no longer chaffed the policeman by calling him *Ba-lingue*; he even went so far as to admit that the Emperor was perhaps a decent fellow. He seemed especially to esteem Virginie, a woman of sense, he would say, and one who would know perfectly well how to bring her ship home. It was evident he was getting an influence over them.

From this moment, the latter would covertly watch the Coupeaus whilst eating their dry bread, and, becoming very talkative once more, would deafen them with his continual jeremiaids. The whole day Gervaise moved in the midst of that poverty which he so complacently spread out. He was not speaking for himself, great heavens! He would starve with his friends as much as one liked. Only, prudence required that one should fully take stock of one's position. They owed at least five hundred francs in the neighbourhood—to the baker, the charcoal-dealer, the grocer, and the others. Besides which, they were behind two quarters with their rent, which meant two hundred and fifty francs; the landlord, M. Marescot, even spoke of having them turned out if they did not pay him by the 1st of January. At last,

the pawnshop had eaten up everything, they could not have got together three francs' worth of little trifles about the house, the clearance had been so complete; the nails remained in the walls, and that was all, and perhaps there were two pounds of them at three sous the pound. Gervaise, thoroughly entangled in it all, her nerves quite upset by this state of things, would get quite angry and bang her fists down upon the table, or else she would end by bursting into tears like a fool. One night she cried,—

"I'll be off to-morrow, I will! I prefer to put the key under the door and to sleep on the pavement rather than continue to live in such fearful dread."

"It would be wiser," said Lantier slyly, "to get quit of the lease, if you could find someone to take it. When you are both resolved to give up the shop——"

She interrupted him more violently

"At once, at once! Ah! I should be so relieved."

Then the hatter became very practical. On giving up the lease, one would doubtless get the new tenant to be responsible for the two quarters in which they were bound. And he ventured to speak of the Poissons; he reminded them that Virginie was looking out for a shop; theirs would perhaps suit her. He remembered that he had heard her say she longed for one just like it. But, when Virginie's name was mentioned, the laundress suddenly regained her calmness. She would see about it; she had talked of giving up everything when in a rage, only the thing did not appear so easy when she took time to reflect on it.

During the following days, it was in vain that Lantier recommenced his talk. Gervaise replied that she had seen herself worse off and pulled through. It would be a wonderful improvement when she no longer had her shop! That would not put bread into her mouth. She would, on the contrary, engage some fresh workwomen, and make a fresh connection. She said that for the sake of battling against the hatter's sound arguments, for he

showed her herself on the ground, crushed beneath her debts, and without the least hope of ever remounting her horse of prosperity. And he again made the mistake of pronouncing Virginie's name, and she then became furiously obstinate. No, no, never! She had always had her doubts of Virginie's sincerity, if Virginie coveted the shop, it was in order to humble her. She would perhaps have given it up to the first woman in the street, but not to that tall hypocrite who had certainly been waiting for years to see her take the last leap. Oh, that explained everything. She now comprehended why yellow sparks lighted up the cat's eyes of that madam. Yes, Virginie still had the thrashing at the wash-house on her mind; she was all the while quietly nursing her revenge. Well, she would do wisely to put her thrashing under glass, if she did not wish to receive a second. And it would not take long; she could get ready her weapons.

In the face of this flow of unpleasant language, Lantier began by attacking Gervaise. He called her wooden-head, slander-box, mother grumbler, and even went so far as to abuse Coupeau, accusing him of not knowing how to make his wife respect his friend. Then, realising that passion would spoil everything, he swore that he would never again interest himself in other people's concerns, for one always got more kicks than thanks; and indeed he appeared to have given up all idea of talking them into giving up the lease; notwithstanding he was really watching for a favourable opportunity to broach the subject again and of getting the laundress to decide as he advised.

January had now arrived; the weather was horrible,—both damp and cold. Mother Coupeau, who had coughed and choked all through December, was forced to take to her bed after Twelfth-night. It was her annuity; every winter she looked forward to it. However, that winter every one who knew her said that she would only leave her room feet first; and she had in all truth a terrible

rattling in her throat, which had the hollow sound of the grave about it; yet for all that she was big and plump, though already blind of one eye, and with half her face twisted. Her children, sure enough, would not have finished her off, only she had been lingering for so long, she was such an encumbrance that they inwardly desired death as a deliverance for everyone. She herself would be far happier, for she had lasted her time, had she not? and when one has lasted one's time, one has nothing to regret. The doctor who had been called in once had not even returned. They gave her an infusion, by way of not abandoning her entirely. Every hour someone looked in to see if she still lived. She no longer spoke, she was suffocating; but with her eye that was still good, clear and full of life, she would look fixedly at the people; and so many things were reflected in that eye: regret for her youth, sadness at realising that her family were so anxious to be rid of her, anger with that vicious Nana, who now openly got up in the night and watched through the glass door in her night-gown.

One Monday evening Coupeau came home tipsy. Ever since his mother was in danger, he had lived in a continual condition of deep emotion. When he was in bed, snoring soundly, Gervaise moved about the place for a while. She was in the habit of watching the old woman during a part of the night. Nana, however, showed herself very brave, always sleeping beside the old woman, and saying that if she heard her die, she would alarm everyone. That night, as the child was asleep, and the invalid appeared to be dozing quietly, the laundress ended by yielding to Lantier, who called to her from his room, where he advised her to come and rest a little. They only kept a candle alight, placed on the ground behind the wardrobe. But, towards three o'clock, Gervaise abruptly jumped out of bed, shivering and oppressed with anguish. She had imagined she felt a cold breath pass over her body. The little bit of candle had burnt out; she tied on her petticoats in the dark,

quite bewildered, and with feverish hands. It was only when she got into the little room, after knocking up against the furniture, that she was able to light a little lamp. In the midst of the oppressive silence of night, the zinc-worker's snores alone sounded as two grave notes. Nana, stretched on her back, was breathing gently between her pouting lips. And Gervaise, holding down the lamp, which caused big shadows to dance about the room, cast the light on mother Coupeau's face, and saw it all white, the head lying on the shoulder, the eyes wide open. Mother Coupeau was dead.

Gently, without uttering a cry, icy cold, yet prudent, the laundress went back to Lantier's room. He had fallen asleep again. She bent over him, and murmured,—

"I say; it's all over; she's dead."

Heavy with sleep, only half awake he grunted at first,—

"Leave me in peace; get into bed. We can't do her any good if she's dead."

"Then he raised himself up on his elbow and asked,—

"What's the time?"

"Three o'clock."

"Only three o'clock! Get into bed then. You'll catch cold. When daylight breaks we'll see what's to be done."

However, she did not listen to him; she dressed herself completely. Then he rolled himself up in the blanket, and turned his nose to the wall, talking of the confounded obstinacy of women. What need was there of such haste to let everyone know that there was a death in the house? It was certainly no more lively in the middle of the night; and he was exasperated at having his rest broken by black thoughts. Moreover, when she had removed her things into her own room, even her hair-pins, she sat down and sobbed to her heart's content, no longer fearing of being discovered with the hatter. At heart, she really loved mother Coupeau. She felt a great

sorrow, after having, in the first instance, only experienced fear and annoyance at her having chosen such an awkward time for going off. And she wept all alone, very bitterly in the silence, the zinc-worker not ceasing his snoring: he heard nothing; she had called and shaken him, then she had decided to let him alone, reflecting that it would only be a fresh annoyance if he did wake up. On returning to the body, she found Nana sitting up in bed rubbing her eyes. The child understood, and with her vicious monkey's curiosity, stretched out her neck to see her grandmother better; she said nothing, but she trembled slightly, surprised and satisfied in the presence of this death which she has been promising herself for two days past like some nasty thing concealed and forbidden to children; and her young cat-like eyes dilated before that white mask, all emaciated at the last hiccough by the passion of life, she felt that stiffness in her back which held her behind the glass door when she crept there to spy on what was no concern of youngsters like her.

"Come, get up," said her mother in a low voice. "I can't let you remain here."

She regretfully slipped out of bed, turning her head round, and not taking her look off the corpse. Gervaise was much embarrassed about her, not knowing where to put her till daytime. She was about to tell her to dress herself, when Lantier, in his trousers and slippers, rejoined her; he could not get to sleep again, and was rather ashamed of his conduct. Then everything was arranged.

"Let her sleep in my bed," murmured he. "She'll have plenty of room."

Nana looked at her mother and Lantier with her big clear eyes, and assumed her stupid air, the same as on New Year's day when anyone made her a present of a box of chocolate drops. And they certainly did not need to hurry her; she trotted off in her night gown, her naked little feet scarcely touching the tiled floor; she glided

like a snake into the bed which was still quite warm, and she lay stretched out and buried in it, her slim body scarcely moving the counterpane. Each time her mother entered the room, she saw her with her eyes sparkling in her motionless face; she was not sleeping, not moving, but was very red and appearing to reflect on her own affairs.

Towards seven o'clock, before daylight, Coupeau at last awoke. When he learnt his loss he, at first, stood still with dry eyes, stuttering, and with a vague idea that they were playing him some joke. Then he threw himself on the ground, and went and knelt before the corpse; he kissed it and wept like a calf, with such big tears that he quite moistened the sheet with wiping his cheeks. Gervaise had recommenced sobbing, deeply affected by her husband's grief, and quite reconciled to him again; yes, he was better at heart than she had believed him to be. Coupeau's despair mingled with a violent pain in his head. He passed his fingers through his hair, his mouth was dry like on the morning after a spree, and he was still a little tight in spite of his ten hours' sleep. And clenching his fist, he complained aloud. Name of Heaven! she was gone now, his poor mother whom he loved so much. Ah! what a headache he had; it would settle him. It was like a wig of fire, and now they were tearing out his heart. No, it was not just of Fate to set itself in such a way against a man.

"Come, courage, old fellow," said Lantier, raising him from the ground; "you must pull yourself together."

He poured him out a glass of wine, but Coupeau refused to drink.

"What's the matter with me? I've brass in my throat. It's mother, when I saw her I got a taste of brass in my mouth. Mother! my God! mother, mother!"

And he recommenced to cry like a child. All the same, he drank the glass of wine, to extinguish the fire which was burning his chest. Lantier soon went off on

pretex of going to inform the family, and to register the death at the mayor's. He wanted some fresh air. Therefore he did not hurry himself, but smoked cigarettes and enjoyed the sharp cold of the morning. On leaving Madame Lerat's he entered one of the Batignolles milk shops and had a good cup of hot coffee. And he stayed there quite an hour making reflections.

"However, towards nine o'clock, the family were all united in the shop, the shutters of which were kept up. Lorilleux did not weep; moreover, he had some pressing work to attend to, and he returned almost directly to his room, after having moved about with a face put on for the occasion. Madame Lorilleux and Madame Lerat embraced the Coupeaus, and wiped their eyes, from which a few tears were falling. But the first named, when she had cast a hasty glance round about the body, all at once raised her voice to say it was unheard of, that one never left a lighted lamp beside a corpse; there should be a candle, and Nana was sent to purchase a packet of tall ones. Ah well! it made one long to die at Hobbler's; she laid one hand out in such a fine style. What a fool not even to know what to do with a corpse. Had she then never buried any one in her life? Madame Lerat had to go to the neighbours and borrow a crucifix; she brought one back which was two big; a cross of black wood with a Christ in painted carboard fastened to it, which covered the whole of mother Coupeau's chest, and seemed to crush her under its weight. Then they tried to get some holy water, but no one had any, and it was again Nana who was sent to the church to bring some back in a bottle. In time enough to turn round, the tiny room presented quite another appearance; on a little table a candle was burning beside a glassful of holy water into which a sprig of box was dipped. Now, if anyone came, it would at least look decent. And they set the chairs in a circle in the shop for receiving people.

Lantier only got back at eleven o'clock. He had been to the undertaker's for information.

"The coffin is twelve francs," he said. "If you want a mass, it will be ten francs more. Then there's the hearse, the price of which is according to the ornaments."

"Oh! that's quite unnecessary," murmured Madame Lorilleux, raising her head in a surprised and anxious manner. "We can't bring mother to life again, can we? One must do according to one's purse."

"Certainly, that's just what I think," resumed the hatter. "I merely asked the prices to guide you. Tell me what you wish; and after lunch I will go and give the orders."

They talked in a low voice, in the dim light which entered the shop through the cracks in the shutters. The door of the little chamber remained wide open; and, from that gaping aperture, issued the great stillness of death. Children's laughter rose in the courtyard, a troop of youngsters were dancing in a ring in the pale winter sunshine. All at once, one heard Nana, who had escaped from the Boches', where she had been sent. She was issuing her orders in her shrill voice, and the heels beat time on the paving-stones, whilst these words were sung and ascended in the air like the noise of some chattering birds,—

"Our donkey, our donkey,
He has got a bad leg,
Madame has had him made
A pretty little sock,
And some lilac-colour shoes, oes, oes,
And some lilac-colour shoes!"

Gervaise waited to say in her turn,—

"We're not rich, that's sure enough; but notwithstanding that, we wish to act decently. If mother Coupeau has left us nothing it's no reason for throwing her into the ground like a dog. No, we must have a mass, and a hearse respectable enough——"

"And who will pay for them?" violently inquired Madame Lorilleux. "Not we, who lost some cash last

week ; not you either, as you're cleaned out. Ah ! you ought, however, to see where it has led you, this trying to astonish people ! ”

Coupeau, when consulted, mumbled something with a gesture of profound indifference, and then he fell asleep again on his chair. Madame Lerat said that she would pay her share. She was of Gervaise's opinion, they ought to conduct things decently. Then, the two of them fell to making calculations on a piece of paper ; in all, it would amount to about ninety francs, because they resolved, after a long argument to have a hearse ornamented with a narrow scallop.

“ We're three,” concluded the laundress. “ We'll give thirty francs a piece. It won't ruin us.”

But Madame Lorilleux burst out furiously.

“ Well ! I refuse, yes, I refuse ! It's not for the thirty francs. I'd give a hundred thousand, if I had them, and if this would bring mother to life again. Only, I don't like vain people. You've got a shop ; you only dream of showing off before the district. We don't fall in with it, we don't. We don't pretend to be what we are not. Oh ! you can manage it to please yourself. Put plumes on the hearse if it amuses you.”

“ No one is asking for anything,” Gervaise ended by answering. “ Even though I should have to sell myself, I'll not have anything to reproach myself with. I've fed mother Coupeau without your assistance, and I can certainly bury her without your help also. I already once before gave you a bit of my mind : I pick up stray cats ; I'm not likely to abandon your mother in the mire.”

Then Madame Lorilleux burst into tears, and Lantier had to prevent her from going away. The quarrel had become so noisy, that Madame Lerat energetically said “ hush ! ” and thought it her duty to go gently into the little chamber, and give a sad and anxious glance at the dead women, as though she feared she would find her come to life again, and listening to the argument going

on so near her. At this moment the troop of little girls in the courtyard again broke out with their song, Nana's piercing voice being heard high above the others,—

“Our donkey, our donkey,
Has got a stomach-ache,
Madame has had him made
A nice little waist-band,
And some lilac-colour shoes, oes, oes,
And some lilac-coloured shoes !”

“Good heavens ! how those children grate on one's nerves with their singing !” said Gervaise, all upset and on the point of sobbing with impatience and sadness, to Lantier. “Do please make them stop that nonsense, and send Nana back to the doorkeeper's with a flea in her ear.”

Madame Lerat and Madame Lorilleux went away to have their lunch, and promised to come back. The Coupeaus sat down to table, and ate some ham, but without an appetite, not daring to strike their forks against their plates. They were very much annoyed and bewildered with poor mother Coupeau, who weighed heavily upon their shoulders, and whose dead presence seemed to them to fill all the rooms. Their life appeared to be turned topsy-turvy. At first they wandered about unable to find things ; they felt as stiff as on the morning after a jollification. Lantier soon went to the door to return to the undertaker's, taking with him Madame Lerat's thirty francs and sixty francs that Gervaise had gone, bareheaded like a mad-woman, and borrowed of Goujet. In the afternoon some visitors called, neighbours who were devoured by curiosity, and arrived heaving tremendous sighs and rolling tearful eyes ; they entered the little chamber and stared at the corpse, making the sign of the cross and shaking the sprig of box dipped in the holy water ; then they sat down in the shop, where they talked ceaselessly of the dear woman, without tiring of repeating the same phrase for hours together.

Mademoiselle Remanjou had observed that her right eye had remained open, Madame Gaudron kept repeating with great obstinacy, that she thought she had a beautiful colour for her age, and Madame Fauconnier was stupefied at the remembrance of having seen her take her coffee three days before. Really, one went off mighty quick; they had better all see that boots were oiled for the last journey.

Towards evening the Coupeaus were beginning to have had enough of it. It was too great a sorrow for a family to have to keep a corpse such a long time. The Government ought to have made a new law on the subject. All through another evening, another night and another morning—no; it would never come to an end. When one no longer weeps, grief turns to irritation. Mother Coupeau, dumb and stiff in the depths of the narrow room, was spreading more and more over the lodging and becoming heavy enough to crush the people in it. And the family, in spite of itself, gradually returned to its ordinary mode of life, and lost some portion of its respect.

"You must have a bite with us," said Gervaise to Madame Lerat and Madame Lorilleux, when they came back. "We're too sad; we must not part so."

They laid the cloth on the work-table. Each one, on seeing the plates, thought of the feastings they had had on it. Lantier had returned. Lorilleux came down. A pastry-cook had just brought a meat pie, for the laundress had no energy left to attend to any cooking. As they were sitting down, Boche came to say that M. Marescot asked to be admitted, and the landlord, presented himself, looking very grave, and wearing a broad decoration on his frock-coat. He bowed in silence, and went straight to the little room, where he knelt down. He was very pious; he prayed in the accustomed manner of a priest, then made the sign of the cross in the air, whilst he sprinkled the body with the sprig of box. All the family, leaving the table, stood up,

greatly moved, M. Marescot, having ended his devotions, passed into the shop and said to the Coupeaus,—

“I have called for the two quarters’ rent which remained unpaid. Can you give it me?”

“No, sir, not quite,” stammered Gervaise, greatly annoyed at hearing this mentioned before the Lorilleux. “You will understand, with the misfortune which has fallen upon us——”

“No doubt, but everyone has his troubles,” resumed the landlord, spreading out his immense fingers, which told of the former workman. “I am very sorry, but I cannot wait any longer. If I am not paid by the morning after to-morrow, I shall be forced to have recourse to expulsion.”

Gervaise, struck dumb, imploringly clasped her hands, her eyes full of tears. With an energetic shake of his big boney head, he gave her to understand that all supplications were useless. Besides the respect due to the dead forbade all discussion. He discreetly retired, walking backwards.

“A thousand pardons for having disturbed you,” murmured he. “The morning after to-morrow; do not forget.”

And as, on going out, he again passed before the little room, he saluted the corpse a last time, through the wide open door, by a devout bending of his knee.

They began by eating quickly, so as not to seem to be taking any pleasure in it. But when they reached the dessert, they lingered, overcome by a desire to take things easier. Now and again Gervaise, or one of the two sisters, went and peeped into the little room, with her mouth full, and without even laying down her napkin; and when she returned to her seat, finished what she was eating, and the others looked at her for a second, to ascertain if everything was going on all right in the little chamber. Then the ladies disturbed themselves less frequently; mother Coupeau was forgotten. They had made a big bowl of coffee, and very strong too, so as to

keep themselves awake all night. The Poissons looked in about eight o'clock. They invited them to take a glass. Then Lantier, who had been watching Gervaise's face, appeared to seize an opportunity that he had been waiting for ever since the morning. In speaking of the abominable rudeness of landlords who entered houses where there was a corpse to demand their money, he said suddenly,—

"He's a Jesuit, the brute, with his air of officiating at a mass! But, in your place, I'd just throw up his shop altogether."

Gervaise, quite worn out, and feeling weak and nervous, gave herself up to fate, and replied,—

"Yes, I shall certainly not wait for the men of law. Ah! it breaks me—breaks me down utterly."

The Lorilleux, charmed with the idea that the Hobbler would no longer have a shop, approved the plan thoroughly. One could hardly imagine the great cost a shop was. If she only earned three francs working for others, she at least had no expenses; she did not risk losing large sums of money. They repeated this argument to Coupeau, pressing him on; he drank an immense deal, and remained in a continuous fit of sensibility, weeping all by himself in his plate. As the laundress appeared to be permitting herself to be persuaded, Lantier looked at the Poissons and winked. Tall Virginie intervened, making herself amiable.

"You know, we might arrange the matter. I would take up the rest of the lease, and settle your affair with the landlord. In fact, you would be left at peace."

"No, thanks," declared Gervaise, shaking herself, as though she felt a shudder pass over her. "I know where to find money for the rent. I'll work; I've my two arms, thank Heaven! to help me out of my difficulties."

"We can talk over this matter some other time," the hatter hastened to remark. "It's not very proper to do so this evening. Later—to-morrow, for instance."

At this moment, Madame Lerat, who had gone into the

little room, uttered a faint cry. She had had a fright, because she had found the candle extinguished. They all busied themselves in lighting another; and they shook their heads, saying that it was not a good sign when the light went out beside a corpse."

The wake began. Coupeau had gone to lie down, not to sleep, said he, but to think; and five minutes afterwards he was snoring. When they sent Nana off to sleep at the Boches', she cried; she had been anticipating ever since the morning being warm and cosy in Lantier's big bed. The Poissons stayed till midnight. Some hot wine had been made in a salad-bowl, because the coffee affected the ladies' nerves too much. The conversation became tenderly effusive. Virginie spoke of the country; she would like to be buried at the corner of a wood, with wild flowers on her grave. Madame Lerat declared she had already put by in her wardrobe the sheet for her shroud, and she kept it perfumed with a bunch of lavender; she desired always to have a nice smell under her nose when she would be eating the dandelions by the roots. Then, without any transition, the policeman told how he had arrested a fine girl that morning, who had been stealing from a pork-butcher's shop. The wake became livelier, while still preserving appearances.

The night seemed fearfully long to them. Now and again they shook themselves, drank some coffee, and stretched their necks towards the little room, where the candle, which was not to be snuffed, was burning with a dull red flame, increased by the black mushrooms on the wick. Towards morning, they shivered, notwithstanding the great heat of the stove. Sorrow, and the fatigue of having talked too much, was almost suffocating them, whilst their mouths were parched, and their eyes ached. Madame Lerat threw herself on Lantier's bed, and snored like a man; whilst the other two, their heads falling forward, and almost touching their knees, dozed before the fire. At day-break a shudder awoke them. Mother Coupeau's candle had again gone out.

The funeral was to take place at half-past ten. A nice morning to add to the night and the day before! That is to say, Gervaise, though without a sou, would have given a hundred francs to anyone who would have come and taken mother Coupeau away three hours sooner. No, one may love people, but they are too heavy a weight when they are dead; and even the more one has loved them, the sooner one would like to be rid of their bodies.

The morning of a funeral is, happily, full of distractions of thought. One has all sorts of preparations to make. To begin with, they had lunch. Then, it happened to be old Bazouge, the mute, who lived in the sixth floor, who came with the coffin and the sack of bran. He was never sober, this man. At eight o'clock that day, he was still lively from the spree of the day before.

"This is for here, isn't it?" asked he.

And he laid down the coffin, which creaked like a new box, but as he was throwing the sack of bran on one side, he stood with a look of wonder in his eyes, his mouth opened wide, on perceiving Gervaise before him.

"Beg pardon, excuse me I've made a mistake," stammered he. "They told me it was for here."

He had already taken up the sack again, and the laundress had to call to him,—

"Leave it alone; it's for here."

"Ah! thunder of heavens! let's understand each other!" resumed he, slapping his thigh. "Oh, I see, it's the old lady."

Gervaise had become quite pale. Old Bazouge had brought the coffin for her. By way of apology he tried to be gallant, and went on,—

"Is it not strange? They told me yesterday that it was someone on the ground floor who had gone off. Then I thought— You know, in our business, these things enter by one ear and go out by the other. All the same, let me congratulate you. As late as possible,

eh? That's best, though life isn't all lavender; ah! no, by Jove!"

She listened to him and drew back, as if she had a fear that he would seize her in his big dirty hands, and carry her away in his box. On her wedding night, he had told her that he knew women who would thank him if he came to take them away. Ah, well! she had not yet got to that point; still it gave her a chill down her back. Her life was spoilt, but she had no desire to go off so soon. Yes, she would rather starve for years, than die the death just the matter of a second.

"He's quite drunk," murmured she, with an air of disgust mingled with her trembling. "The undertaker, at least, oughtn't to send us fuddlers. We pay dear enough."

Then the mute became insolent, and jeered.

"I say, little mother, it's only put off till another time. I'm entirely at your service, remember! You've only to make me a sign. I'm the ladies' consoler. And don't go against old Bazouge, because he's held in his arms finer ones than you, who let themselves be put into their last bed without a murmur, very pleased to continue their peepy-peepy in the dark."

"Hold your tongue, old Bazouge!" said Lorilleux, severely, having hastened to the spot on hearing the noise; "such jokes are highly unsuitable. If we complained about you, you would be discharged. Come, be off, as you've no respect for principles."

The mute moved away, but one could hear him stuttering as he dawdled along the pavement.

"Well! What? principles! There's no such thing as principles—there's nothing but honesty!"

At last ten o'clock struck. The hearse was late. There were already several people in the shop, friends and neighbours—M. Madinier, Mes-Bottes, Madame Gaudron, Mademoiselle Remanjou; and every minute, a man's or a woman's head was thrust out of the wide-opened door, between the closed shutters, to see if that

creeping hearse was in sight. The family, all together in the back room, were shaking hands. Short pauses occurred, interrupted by rapid whisperings, a tiresome and feverish waiting, with sudden rushes of skirts—Madame Lorilleux who had not brought her handkerchief, or else Madame Lerat who was trying to borrow a prayer-book. Everyone on arriving saw the open coffin in the middle of the little room before the bed; and in spite of all each stood silently studying it, calculating that plump mother Coupeau would never be got into it. They all looked at each other with this thought in their eyes, though without communicating it. But there was a slight rush at the street door. M. Madinier, extending his arms, came and said, in a low, grave voice,—

“Here they are!”

It was not the hearse yet. Four mutes entered hurriedly in single file, with their red faces, their hands all hardened like those of persons in the habit of moving heavy things, and their rusty black clothes becoming white from constant rubbing against coffins. Old Bazouge walked first, very drunk and very proper. As soon as he settled to his work he found his equilibrium. They did not utter a word, but slightly bowed their heads, already weighing mother Coupeau with a look. And they did not put off; the poor old woman was packed in, in the time one takes to sneeze. The shortest, a young fellow who squinted, had emptied the bran into the coffin, and spread it out, kneading it as though he wished to make bread. Another, a tall lean chap, with a funny look, laid the sheet over it. Then one, two, off you go! The four of them seized hold of the body and lifted it up, two at the feet and two at the head. One could not toss a pancake quicker. The persons who were stretching their necks might have imagined that mother Coupeau had herself made a leap into the box. She glided into it as though quite at home. Oh! a perfect fit, so perfect that one heard her rub against the new wood. She touched on all sides, a complete picture in

a frame. Yes, she was in, and the fact greatly amazed the lookers-on. She had surely grown less in size since the night before.

The mutes were now standing up and waiting; the little chap with a squint took the coffin lid, by way of inviting the family to bid their last farewell, whilst Bazouge had filled his mouth with tacks and was holding the hammer in readiness. Then Coupeau, his two sisters, and Gervaise threw themselves on their knees and kissed the mother who was going away, with big tears whose hot drops were falling on and streaming down the stiff face cold as ice. There was a prolonged sound of sobbing. The lid was placed on, and old Bazouge knocked the nails in with the knock of a packer, two blows for each; and no one listened any longer to their own weeping in that noise, which resembled that of furniture being repaired. It was over. They were about to start.

"What a commotion to make at such a time!" said Madame Lorilleux to her husband, as she perceived the hearse before the door.

The hearse was making quite a revolution in the neighbourhood. The tripe-seller called to the grocer's men, the little clockmaker came out on to the pavement, the neighbours leant out of their windows; and all these people remarked upon the scallop with its fringes of white cotton. Ah! the Coupeaus would have done better to have paid their debts. But, as the Lorilleux declared, when one is proud it shows itself everywhere and through everything.

"It's shameful!" repeated Gervaise at the same moment, talking of the chain-maker and his wife. "To think that those skinflints have not even brought a bunch of violets for their mother!"

The Lorilleux, in truth, had come with empty hands. Madame Lerat had given a wreath of artificial flowers. And a wreath of immortelles and a bouquet bought by the Coupeaus were also placed on the coffin. The mutes

had had to bring all their shoulder muscle into play to raise the coffin and put it into the hearse. The procession was some time in being formed. Coupeau and Lorilleux, in frock-coats and with their hats in their hands, acted as chief mourners; the first, in his emotion, which two glasses of white wine early in the morning had helped to keep up, clung to his brother-in-law's arm, with no strength in his legs and a violent headache. Then followed the other men: M. Madinier, very grave and all in black; Mes-Bottes, wearing a great coat over his blouse; Boche, whose yellow trousers were like a flame; Lantier, Gaudron, Bibi-the-Smoker, Poisson, and others besides. The ladies came next: in the first row Madame Lorilleux, who dragged along the deceased's skirt, which she had altered; Madame Lerat, hiding under a shawl her improvised mourning, a gown with lilac trimmings; and after them Virginie, Madame Gaudron, Madame Fauconnier, Mademoiselle Ramanjou, and the rest of the quene. When the hearse started and slowly descended the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or, amidst signs of the cross and heads bared, the four mutes took the lead, two in front, the others on the right and left. Gervaise had remained behind to close the shop. She left Nana with Madame Boche, and ran to make up to the procession, whilst the child, held by the doorkeeper under the porch, watched with a deeply-interested gaze her grandmother disappear at the end of the street, in that beautiful carriage.

Just at the moment when the laundress, quite out of breath, reached the end of the procession, Goujet also arrived. He went with the men; but he looked back and nodded his head to her, so gently that she felt all on a sudden very wretched and again burst into tears. She was no longer crying for mother Coupeau only; she was weeping because of something terrible which she could not have put into words, and which was stifling her. She kept her handkerchief pressed to her eyes all the way. Madame Lorilleux, with dry and inflamed

cheeks, looked at her sideways, as if she were accusing her of doing it all for show.

The ceremony at the church was quickly got over. The mass dragged a little though, because the priest was very old. Mes-Bottes and Bibi-the-Smoker preferred to remain outside, because of the collection. M. Madinier studied the priests all the while, and communicated his observations to Lantier; those jokers, though so glib with their Latin, did not even know a word of what they were saying; they buried you just in the same way that they baptised or married you, without having the least feeling in their heart. Then M. Madinier blamed all those ceremonies, those lights, those sad voices, and that display before the families. Really, one lost one's relatives twice, at home and at church. And all the men said he was right; for it was another painful moment, when, the mass finished, there was a mumbling of prayers, and the people who assisted at the funeral had to pass before the coffin, sprinkling it with holy water.

Fortunately, the cemetery was not far off, the little cemetery of La Chapelle, a piece of a garden which opened on to the Rue Marcardet. The procession arrived disbanded, with stampings of feet and everyone talking of his own affairs. The hard earth resounded, and many would have liked to have beat with their feet to keep themselves warm. The gaping hole, beside which the coffin was laid, was already frozen over, and looked pale and stony, like a plaster quarry; and the followers, grouped round little heaps of gravel, did not find it comfortable standing in such piercing cold; looking at the hole, too, likewise put them out. At length, a priest in a surplice came out of a little cottage; he shivered, and one could see his steaming breath at every *de profundis* that he uttered. At the final sign of the cross he rushed off, without the least wish to go through the service again. The sexton took his shovel, but on account of the frost he could only detach large lumps of earth, which beat a fine tune down below, a regular

bombardment of the coffin, an enfilade of artillery, enough to make one think the wood was splitting. The weeping began again. They moved off, but even when they got outside, they still heard the detonations. Mes-Bottes, blowing on his fingers, uttered a remark aloud,—

“Ah! thunder of Heaven! no! poor mother Coupeau won't feel very warm!”

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said the zinc-worker to the few friends who remained in the street with the family, “will you allow us to offer you some refreshments?”

And he was the first to enter a wine-shop in the Rue Marcadet, the “Arrival at the Cemetery.” Gervaise, remaining outside, called Goujet, who was moving away, after again nodding to her. Why didn't he accept a glass of wine? No; he was in a hurry, he was going back to the workshop. Then, they looked at each other a moment without speaking.

“I must ask your pardon for annoying you about the sixty francs,” at length murmured the Jaundress. “I was half mad; I thought of you——”

“Oh! don't mention it; you're fully pardoned,” interrupted the blacksmith. “And you know I'm quite at your service if any misfortune should come upon you. But don't say anything to my mother, because she has her ideas, and I don't wish to cause her any vexation.”

She was still looking at him; and on perceiving him so good, so sad, with his beautiful yellow beard, she was on the point of consenting to his old proposal, that of going away with him and living happy together somewhere. Then another evil thought came into her head, which was to borrow of him the money for the two overdue quarters' rent, at no matter what cost. She trembled, and resumed in a caressing tone of voice,—

“We're not bad friends, are we?”

He shook his head as he answered,—

“No, certainly not; we shall never be bad friends. Only, you understand, all is over.”

And he went off with long strides, leaving Gervaise

stupefied, listening to his last words, which rang in her ears with the clanging of a bell. On entering the wine-shop, she seemed to hear a hollow voice within her which said, "All is over; well! all is over; there is nothing more for me to do now if all is over!" She sat down and swallowed a mouthful of bread and cheese, and emptied a glassful of wine which she found before her.

It was a long, low room on the ground floor, and was nearly filled by two big tables. Bottles of wine, quarter loaves of bread, and large slices of Brie cheese on three plates were spread out in a row. The party was just having a bite, without either tablecloth or knives. Farther off, beside the roaring stove, the four mutes were finishing their lunch.

"God knows!" explained M. Madinier, "we each have our turn. The old folks make room for the young ones. Your house will seem very empty to you now when you go home."

"Oh! my brother's going to give notice," said Madame Lorilleux, quickly. "That shop's ruination."

They had been working upon Coupeau. Everyone was urging him to throw up the lease. Madame Lerat herself, who had been on very good terms with Lantier and Virginie for some time past, and who was tickled with the idea that they had taken a sort of liking to each other, talked of bankruptcy and prison, putting on very terrified airs. And, suddenly, the zinc-worker, already over-dosed with liquor, got into a perfect passion, his emotion turning into fury.

"Listen," he cried, pushing his nose into his wife's face; "I mean that you shall listen to me! Your confounded head will always have its own way. But, this time, I shall follow my own will, I warn you!"

"Ah well," said Lantier, "one never yet brought her to reason by fair words; it needs a mallet to drive it into her head."

And both fell to abusing her for some time. That

did not prevent the jaws from doing their work—the Brie cheese disappeared, the bottles of wine flowed like fountains. However, Gervaise was fast giving way under the blows. She answered nothing, but hurried herself, her mouth ever full, as though she had been very hungry. When they got fatigued talking to her, she gently raised her head and said,—

“That’s enough, isn’t it? I don’t care a button for the shop! I want no more of it. Do you understand? I send it to the deuce! All is over!”

Then they ordered more bread and cheese and talked seriously. The Poissons took the rest of the lease and agreed to be answerable for the two quarters’ rent unpaid. Boche, moreover, with an air of importance, agreed to the arrangement in the landlord’s name. He even, as he sat there, let a lodging to the Coupeaus—the vacant one on the sixth floor, in the same passage as the Lorilleux’ rooms. As for Lantier, by all means! he would like to keep his rooms, if it did not inconvenience the Poissons. The policeman bowed; it did not inconvenience him at all; friends always get on together, notwithstanding any difference in their political ideas. And Lantier, without mixing himself up any more in the affair, like a man who has at last settled his little matter, helped himself to an enormous slice of bread and cheese; he leant back in his chair and ate devoutly, his blood tingling beneath his skin, his whole body burning with a sly joy, and he blinked his eyes to peep at Gervaise and Virginie one after the other.

“Hi! old Bazouge!” called Coupeau, “come and taste a drop. We’re not proud; we’re all workers.”

The four mutes who were going off came back to clink glasses with the company. It was no reproach; but the lady they had been burying weighed heavy, and it was well worth a glass of wine. Old Bazouge looked fixedly at the laundress, but did not utter an unbecoming word. She rose from her seat, feeling uncomfortable, and left the men, who were all getting tipsy. Coupeau, who was

as drunk as an owl, recommenced weeping loudly, and said it was grief.

That evening when Gervaise found herself at home again, she continued in a stupefied state. It seemed to her that the rooms were very large and deserted. Really, it would be a good riddance. But it was certainly not only mother Coupeau that she had left at the bottom of the hole in the little garden of the Rue Marcadet. She missed too many things, very likely a part of her life, and her shop, and her pride of being an employer, and other sentiments besides, which she had buried on that day.

At ten o'clock, when undressing, Nana cried and stamped. She wanted to lie in mother Coupeau's bed. Her mother tried to frighten her; but the child was too precocious. Dead bodies only filled her with a great curiosity; so that, for the sake of peace, she was permitted to lie down in mother Coupeau's place. She liked big beds; she spread herself out and rolled about. She slept uncommonly well that night in the warm and delicate feather bed.

CHAPTER X

THE new lodging of the Coupeaus was on the sixth floor, staircase B. After passing Mademoiselle Remanjou's door, the passage on the left had to be traversed. Then there came another turning. The first door was the Bijards'. Almost opposite, in a hole without air, under a little staircase, which went up to the roof, old Bru slept. Two lodgings farther on, was Bazouge's. Then next to Bazouge's was the Coupeaus', a room and a closet, looking upon the courtyard. And there were only two more families along the passage before reaching the Lorilleux, who were quite at the end.

A room and closet, no more. The Coupeaus perched there now. And the room was about as large as one's hand. And they had to do everything in there—eat, sleep, and all the rest. Nana's bed just filled the closet; she had to dress in her father and mother's room, and her door had to be left open at night-time, that she should not be suffocated. There was such little space, that Gervaise had sold some things to the Poissons in quitting the shop, not being able to find room for them. What with the bed, the table, and four chairs, the lodging was quite crammed. Her heart almost broken, and not having the courage to separate herself from her chest of drawers, she had encumbered what little space remained with this lumbering piece of furniture, which blocked up half the window. One half was thus condemned to darkness, and but little light and cheerfulness could enter. Whenever she wanted to look down into the courtyard,

there was not room enough for her elbows, as she was growing very stout, and she was obliged to lean out sideways, straining her neck so as to see.

On leaning one day, Gervaise experienced a strange sensation ; she fancied she beheld herself down below, near the doorkeeper's room under the porch, her nose in the air, and examining the house for the first time ; and this leap thirteen years backwards made her heart throb. The courtyard had not altered ; the bare facades were scarcely blacker or more leprous, a stench still rose from the sinks rotting with rust ; on the lines at the windows, clothes and children's napkins continued to hang out to dry ; down below, the rough pavement was littered with the cinders from the locksmith's, and the shavings from the carpenter's ; even in the damp corner near the water-tap, there was a pool that had flowed from the dyer's, tinted with a blue as delicate as the blue of other days. But she felt terribly changed and faded. To begin with, she was no longer below, her face raised to Heaven, feeling content and courageous, and aspiring to a beautiful lodging. She was right up under the roof, in the dirtiest hole, the part that never received a ray of sunshine. And that was the explanation of her tears ; she could scarcely feel enchanted with her fate.

However, when Gervaise had grown somewhat accustomed to it, the early days of the little family in their new home did not roll on so badly. The winter was almost past, and the trifle of money received for the furniture sold to Virginie helped to make things pleasanter. Then, with the fine weather, came a piece of luck. Coupeau was engaged to work in the country, at Etampes ; and he was there for over three months without once getting drunk, cured for a time by the fresh air. One has no idea how it quenches the fuddler's thirst to leave Paris, where the streets are full of the fumes of wine and brandy. On his return, he was as fresh as a rose, and he brought back in his pocket four hundred francs, with which they paid the two overdue quarters'

rent of the shop that Poissons had become responsible for, and also the most pressing of their little debts in the districts. Gervaise thus opened two or three streets through which she had not passed for some time. She had naturally become an ironer again at a day's wages. Madame Fauconnier, a very worthy woman, if one only flattered her, had been willing to re-engage her. She even gave her three francs, the same as to a first-class workwoman, out of regard for her old position of employer. Thus it seemed as though the couple would manage to jog along. With work and economy, Gervaise even saw the day when they would be able to pay everybody, and arrange a course of life that would be supportable. She promised herself that, however, in the feverishness arising from the big sum of money earned by her husband. When cool, she accepted things as they came, saying that beautiful things never lasted.

What the Coupeaus most suffered from at that time was seeing the Poissons take up their dwelling at their old shop. They were not naturally of a specially jealous disposition, but people aggravated them, purposely, expressing amazement before them at the embellishments of their successors. The Boches, and above all the Lorilleux, never tired. To hear them, no one had ever seen so beautiful a shop. And they talked of the dirty state in which the Poissons had found the place, telling how the cleaning alone had cost thirty francs. Virginie, after a great deal of hesitation, had decided to go in for the finest part of the grocery business, selling such things as sweetmeats, chocolate, coffee, and tea. Lantier had warmly recommended this department to her, saying that enormous sums were to be made out of such trifles. The shop was painted black, and relieved with yellow fillets, two stylish colours. Three carpenters worked eight days at arranging everything—at the pigeon-holes, the glass cases, and the counter with shelves for the jars, the same as at a confectioner's. The little inheritance which Poisson had in reserve must have been a good

deal bitten into; but Virginie triumphed, and the Lorilleux, assisted by the doorkeepers, did not spare Gervaise a pigeon-hole, a showcase, or a glass jar, feeling delighted whenever they saw her change countenance. One may not indeed be envious, but nevertheless one loses one's temper when others put on your boots and crush you with them.

There was also a question of a man beneath all this. It was declared that Lantier had quitted Gervaise. The district declared that it was quite right. In short, it gave a moral air to the street. And all the honour of the separation was accorded to the sly hatter, in whom all the ladies continued to believe. Details were given, he had been forced to beat the laundress to make her keep quiet, she was so passionately fond of him. Naturally, no one told the real truth; those who might have known it thought it too simple and not interesting enough. If they would have the truth, Lantier had indeed broken off with Gervaise, in this sense that he no longer had her day and night at his disposal; but he certainly went up to the sixth floor to see her, for Mademoiselle Remanjou met him coming out of the Coupeaus at very unlikely hours. In short, the connection continued, by hook or by crook; the remnant of a habit, a few reciprocal complacencies, nothing more. Only, what complicated the situation, was that the neighbourhood now put Lantier and Virginie in the same predicament. There again the neighbourhood was in too much of a hurry. No doubt, the hatter was trying to impress the tall brunette; and that was as it must be, because she replaced Gervaise in everything, and for everything in the lodging.

The Lorilleux, all the same, talked before the laundress of the amours of Lantier and Madame Poisson with a great amount of sentiment, hoping thereby to make her jealous. The Boches also gave out that never before had they seen a handsomer couple. The drollest part of all this was that the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or did not seem

to take offence at the new family of three ; no, morality which had been hard for Gervaise, was mild for Virginie. Perhaps the smiling indulgence of the street came from the fact that the husband was in the police service.

Fortunately, jealousy did not worry Gervaise much. Lantier's infidelities left her very calm, because for a long time her heart had had no interest in anything. With Virginie, it was quite another matter. They had both of them pretended that for the sake of annoying her ; and if she smiled at trifles, she required to be treated with some regard. So that, whenever Madame Lorilleux or some other spiteful animal made a point of saying in her presence that Poisson could no longer pass under the Porte Saint-Denis, she would turn quite white, feeling her bosom beat, and a burning sensation in her breast. She bit her lips, she kept from getting into a passion, not wishing to give such a pleasure to her enemies. But she must have quarrelled with Lantier, for one afternoon Mademoiselle Remanjou thought she could recognise the sound of a slap ; besides, there certainly was some bickering between them, for Lantier did not speak to her for a fortnight. Then he was the first to make it up, and everything seemed to jog on as before, as though nothing had occurred. The laundress preferred to make the best of a bad job, not caring for a general pulling off chignons, and desirous of not making her life worse than it really was. Ah ! she was no longer twenty.

Coupeau laughed. This easy-going husband, who would not seek cuckoldom in his own home, made immense fun about Poisson's pair of horns. In his household it did not count, but in others, he thought it a rare joke, and he gave himself no end of pains to watch for those accidents, when the neighbours' wives went to look at the leaf on the reverse side. What a silly he was, that Poisson ! and yet he carried a sword, and even allowed himself to jostle people on the footpaths ! Then Coupeau had the impudence to chaff Gervaise. Ah, well ! her lover was indeed throwing her up ! She had

no good fortune: the first time, blacksmiths did not succeed, and the second time, it was the hatters who smacked her on the hand. But then, too, she went in for trades that were not at all serious. No doubt, he merely said these things by way of a joke, but all the same Gervaise would turn quite green with terror, because he pierced her through and through with his little grey eyes, as though he had wished to drive the words into her with a gimlet. A man who gets tight from one end of the year to the other no longer knows what he says, and there are husbands who, very jealous at twenty, at thirty become through drink very easy-going on the question of conjugal fidelity.

It was a sight to see Coupeau swaggering about the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or! He called Poisson the cuckold. That closed all the gossips' mouths! The cuckold was no longer himself. Oh! he knew what he knew. If he had pretended not to observe anything before, it was apparently because he did not like quarrels. Each one seems to know what goes on in his own home, and scratches himself where he itches. But it did not make him itch, and he couldn't scratch himself just to please other people. Well! and the policeman, did he notice anything? Yet it was there no doubt about it this time. The lovers had been seen; it was not a mere piece of scandalous gossip. And he got quite angry. He could not understand how a man, a person in the employ of the Government, could allow such a scandal in his own home.

On the nights during which Coupeau felt dull, all alone with his wife in their hole under the roof, this did not prevent his going down for Lantier and taking him off by force. He considered the nest a sad place, now that his comrade was no longer there. He would make him and Gervaise friends again whenever he saw them cold to each other. Thunder of Heaven! cannot one send those who are not satisfied to the mischief? is it forbidden to amuse oneself as one chooses? He

chuckled, broad ideas lit up his drunkard's vacillating eyes, desires to share everything with the hatter, just to embellish life. And it was especially on those evenings that Gervaise was uncertain whether he spoke in jest or in earnest.

In the midst of all this, Lantier kept a very dignified air. He showed himself both paternal and lofty. On three successive occasions he had prevented a quarrel between the Coupeaus and the Poissons. The good understanding between the two families formed a part of his pleasure. Thanks to the tender, though firm, glances with which he watched over Gervaise and Virginie, they always pretended to nourish a great friendship for each other. He reigned over both blonde and brunette with the tranquillity of a pasha, and fattened on his sly ways. The rascal was still digesting the Coupeaus when he already began to devour the Poissons. Oh, it did not put him about much! as soon as one shop was swallowed, he began with a second. It is only men of his sort who ever have any good fortune

It was in June of that year that Nana took her first communion. She was then nearly thirteen years old, as tall as an asparagus shoot run to seed, and had a bold, impudent air about her. The year before she had been sent away from the catechism class on account of her bad conduct; and the priest had only permitted her to join it this time, in case she should be lost altogether and no more heathen be cast on the street. Nana danced for joy as she thought of the white frock. The Lorilleux, being godfather and godmother, had promised the dress, and took care to let everyone in the house know of her present. Madame Lcrat was to give the veil and the cap, Virginie the purse, and Lantier the prayer-book; so that the Coupeaus anticipated the ceremony without any great anxiety. Even the Poissons, wishing to give a house-warming, chose this occasion, no doubt on the hatter's advice. They invited the Coupeaus and the Boches, whose little girl was also going to be

confirmed. They provided a leg of mutton and accompaniments for this special evening.

It so happened that on the night before, Coupeau returned home in a most abominable state just as Nana was lost in admiration before the presents spread out on the top of the chest of drawers. The Paris air was getting the better of him again; and he attacked his wife and child with drunken arguments, which no one should have used at such a time. Nana herself was beginning to get a little loose in the tongue in the midst of the bad language she was continually hearing.

"And bread!" yelled the zinc-worker. "I want my soup, you brace of jades! There're females always going on about their finery! I'll sit on the grand things, you know, if I don't get my soup!"

"How beastly he is when he's tight!" murmured Gervaise, out of patience; and turning towards him, she exclaimed,—

"It's warming; don't be unreasonable."

Nana was doing the modest, because she thought it proper on such a day. She continued to look at the presents on the chest of drawers, affectedly lowering her eyelids, and pretending not to comprehend her father's naughty words. But the zinc-worker was an awful nuisance on the nights when he had had too much. Pushing his face right against her neck, he said,—

"I'll give you white dresses. So fine toys tickle your fancy. They raise your passion. Move your hands about; bundle all that into a drawer, or I'll clean you with it!"

Nana, with bowed head, did not answer a word. She had taken up the little tulle cap, and was asking her mother how much it cost. And as Coupeau thrust out his hand to lay hold of the cap, it was Gervaise who pushed him aside, exclaiming,—

"Do leave the child alone! she's well enough behaved, she's doing no harm."

As soon as the zinc-worker had had his soup he

snored. The next morning he awoke in a very good humour. He still felt a little of the debauch of the day before, but only just sufficient to make him amiable. He assisted at the dressing of the child, deeply affected by the white dress, and finding that a mere nothing gave the little monkey quite a young lady look. And it was something to see Nana's style in her dress, that was too short, and she smiling in an embarrassed way like a young bride. When she went downstairs, and caught sight of Pauline, who was also ready dressed, standing on the outside of the doorkeeper's room, she stopped and looked her all over with her clear glance, and then became very pleasant indeed on seeing that her friend did not look as well as herself, and, moreover, was just like a bundle.

• The two families started off together for the church. Nana and Pauline walked first, their prayer-books in their hands, and holding down their veils as the wind blew them upward; they did not talk, but were bursting with delight at seeing the people come to their shop-doors, and they made a devout *moué* every time they heard anyone say as they passed that they looked very pretty. Madame Boche and Madame Lorilleux came behind, because they were interchanging their views about the Hobbler, a gobble-all whose daughter would never have been confirmed if the relations had not given her everything; yes, everything, even a new chemisette out of respect for the holy altar. Madame Lorilleux particularly busied herself with her present, the dress, crushing Nana with a look, and calling her "big slut" each time the child got a little dust on her skirt, by going too near the shop windows.

At church Coupeau wept all the time. He was quite unable to restrain himself. It quite affected him to see the priest holding out his arms, and all the little girls, looking like angels, pass before him with clasped hands; and the music of the organ stirred up his heart, and the pleasant smell of the incense forced him to sniff, just as

though someone had pushed a bouquet of flowers before his face. In fact, he saw everything through a heavenly colour—his heart was touched. There was a canticle especially, something exceedingly sweet, sung whilst the children were taking the communion, which seemed to run with a shiver down his neck and his backbone. Round about him, too, all the sensitive people were soaking their pocket handkerchiefs. Really it was a bright day, the brightest day of his life. Only, when, on coming out of church, he went to have a glass of wine with Lorilleux, who had kept his own eyes dry, and who chaffed him, he got in a passion, and accused the rooks of burning the devil's herbs in their churches in order to soften people's hearts. All the same, he would not conceal it, his eyes had melted, and that merely proved that he had not got a paving-stone in his bosom. And he ordered another round.

That evening, the Poissons' house-warming was very gay. Friendship reigned without a hitch from one end of the feast to the other. When bad times arrive, one thus comes in for some happy evenings, hours during which sworn enemies love each other. Lantier, with Gervaise on his left and Virginie on his right, was most amiable to both of them, lavishing little tender caresses like a cock who desires peace in the poultry-yard. Opposite to them, Poisson maintained the calm and dignified air of a policeman accustomed to think of nothing, and with a sort of bandage over his eyes during his long journeyings over his beat. But the queens of the feast were the two little ones, Nana and Pauline, who had not been allowed to take off their things; they sat quite upright, through fear of spilling anything on their white dresses, and at every mouthful they were told to hold up their chins so as to swallow cleanly. Nana, greatly annoyed by all this fuss, ended by slabbering her wine over her corsage, so it was taken off, and the stains were at once washed out in a glass of water.

Then, at dessert, the children's future was gravely dis-

cussed. Madame Boche had decided that Pauline should acquire the business of a piercer of gold and silver; one could make from five or six francs a day at it. Gervaise had not quite decided—Nana showed no vocation for anything. Oh! she ran about the streets; she showed a taste for that; but at everything else, she was butter-fingered.

"In your place," said Madame Lerat, "I would bring her up as an artificial flower-maker. It is a nice and clean employment."

"Flower-makers," murmured Lorilleux, "are girls who are all Mary-sleep-you-there!"

"Well! and I?" retorted the tall widow, biting her lips. "You're not over gallant."

But the others made her stop.

"Madame Lerat! oh! Madame Lerat!"

And they drew her notice with winks to the two young girls who had been confirmed, and who were burying their noses in their glasses, so as not to laugh. Out of decency, the men themselves had up till then all selected their words. But Madame Lerat would not take the lesson. What she had just said, she had heard in the very best society. Besides, she flattered herself she knew her own tongue; she had often been complimented on her way of talking, even before children, without ever breaking the orders of propriety.

"It is a very respectable business, artificial flower-making, you must understand that!" said the tall widow. "Goodness comes from the flowers. It's what has preserved me."

"Good heavens!" interrupted Gervaise, "I've no objection to artificial flower-making. Only, it must please Nana, that's all I care about; one should never thwart children as to their vocation. Come, Nana, don't be stupid; tell me now, would you like to make flowers?"

The child, bending over her plate, was gathering up the cake crumbs with her wet finger, which she after-

wards sucked. She did not hurry herself. She gave a sly laugh.

"Why yes, mamma, I should," she ended by declaring.

Then the matter was at once settled. Coupeau was quite willing that Madame Lerat should take the child with her the next day to the place where she worked in the Rue du Caire. And they all spoke very gravely of the duties of life. Boche said that Nana and Pauline were women now that they had communicated. Poisson added that for the future they ought to know how to cook, mend socks, and manage a house. Something was even said of their marrying, and of the children they would some day have. The young girls listened and laughed in their sleeves, rubbing up against one another, red and awkward in their white dresses, their hearts swelling with the pride of being women. But what tickled them most was when Lantier joked them, asking them if they had not already got little sweethearts. And they forced Nana to own that she was very fond of Victor Fauconnier, the son of the laundress's former mistress.

"Ah well!" said Madame Lorilleux to the Boches, as they were all separating, "she's our god-daughter, but as they're going to put her into the artificial flower-making we don't desire to have anything more to do with her."

On retiring to bed, the Coupeaus, agreed that everything had passed off well, and that the Poissons were not at all bad people. Gervaise even thought the shop was nicely got up. She was expecting to suffer a great deal in thus spending the evening in her old house, where others were moving about now; and she was astonished at not having felt angry for a single moment. Nana, who was undressing, asked her mother if the dress of the young lady on the second floor who had been married the month before was a muslin one like hers.

Alas! that was the last happy day in the household. Two years passed by, during which they sank deeper and deeper. The winters particularly cleared them out. If

they had bread to eat during the good weather, the rain and cold came accompanied by hunger, in front of the empty cupboard, and by dinner-hours there was nothing to eat in the Siberia of their larder. That villain December entered their home under the door, and he brought all the evils imaginable—the closing of the workshops, the benumbed idleness engendered by the frost, the black wretchedness of continual wet weather. The first winter, they still had a fire at times, sitting round the stove, preferring to be warm rather than to eat; the second winter the stove did not even once have the rust off it; it froze the room with its wretched air of a cast-iron milestone. And what took the life out of their limbs, what above all utterly crushed them, was the rent. Oh! the January term, when there was not a radish in the house and old Boche came up with the receipt! Then it blew colder, a regular tempest from the north. M. Marescot arrived the following Saturday, wrapped up in a good warm overcoat, his big hands concealed in woollen gloves; and he was always talking of putting them out, whilst the snow continued to fall outside, as though it were preparing a bed for them on the pavement, with white sheets. To have paid the quarter's rent they would have sold their very flesh. It was the rent which emptied the larder and the stove.

In the entire house, moreover, a general lamentation went up. There was weeping on every floor; a dirge of bad luck resounded up the staircases and along the passages. If there had been a corpse in every home, it would not have produced a more heartrending noise of wailing. A thorough day of the last judgment, the end of the end, life made utterly impossible, the annihilation of the poor. The woman on the third floor had to go and do eight days at the corner of the Rue Belhomme. A workman, the mason on the fifth floor, had robbed his employer.

No doubt the Coupeaus had nobody but themselves to blame. Life may be a hard fight, but everyone can

manage somehow when orderly and economical—witness the Lorilleux, who paid their rent to the very day, the money folded up in pieces of dirty paper ; but they, it is true, led a life like that of starved spiders, which would disgust anyone with work. Nana as yet made nothing at flower-making ; it even cost a good deal to keep her. At Madame Fauconnier's, Gervais was beginning to be looked upon with disfavour. She was not nearly so expert ; she did her work so clumsily that the mistress had reduced her wages to forty sous a day, the price paid to the stupidest. With all that she was very proud and very susceptible, throwing at everybody's head her former position of a person in business. Some days she never appeared at all, whilst on others she would leave in the midst of her work through nothing but a fit of temper ; for instance, on one occasion she was so annoyed at Madame Fauconnier's engaging Madame Putois, and at having thus to iron side by side with her former workwoman that she had gone off and had not returned for a fortnight. After these outbursts, she would be taken back out of charity, which embittered her still more. Naturally, when the end of the week came, she had not much money to receive ; and, as she often weepingly observed, it would finish one Saturday by her owing something to her employer.

As for Coupeau, he did work perhaps, but apparently he made a present of his labour to the Government ; for since the time he returned from Etampes, Gervaise had never seen the colour of his money. She no longer looked in his hands when he returned home on pay-days. He arrived swinging his arms, his pockets empty, and often without his handkerchief ; good gracious ! yes, he had lost his "fogle," or else some rascally comrade had sneaked it. At first he made excuses ; he invented all sorts of lies—ten francs for a subscription, twenty francs fallen through a hole which he showed in his pocket, fifty francs disbursed in paying off imaginary debts. After a little, he no longer troubled himself to give any

explanations. The money evaporated, that was all! It moved from his pocket into his stomach. On Madame Boche's advice, the laundress would sometimes go and watch for her husband at the door of the workshop at closing time, so as to strike the iron when hot. But that did not help her much; some of his comrades would warn Coupeau, and the money would glide into his shoes or some purse dirtier still. Madame Boche was very cunning on this point, because Boche was in the habit of cheating her out of pieces of ten francs, which he hid for the purpose of standing treat to amiable friends of his acquaintance. She would examine the smallest corners of his clothes; she generally found the coin that had not answered to the roll-call in the peak of his cap, between the leather and the cloth. Ah! it was not the zinc-worker who padded his rags with gold! He stuffed it under his flesh. Yet Gervaise could not take her scissors and rip open his body.

Yes, it was their own fault if they descended lower and lower every season. But that is the sort of thing one never confesses, especially when one is down in the gutter. They accused their bad fortune; they pretended that Fate was against them. They bickered away the whole day long. However, they had not yet come to blows, with the exception of a few smacks which somehow were given at the height of their disputes. The saddest thing was that they had opened the cage of affection; the better feelings had all taken flight like so many canaries. The loving warmth of father, mother, and child, when united and wrapped up in each other, deserted them, and left them shivering, each in his or her own corner. The whole three—Coupeau, Gervaise, and Nana—were ever ready to seize one another by the hair, biting each other for nothing at all, their eyes full of hatred: and it appeared as though something had broken the mainspring of the family, the mechanism which, with happy people, makes all hearts beat in unison. Ah! it was certain Gervaise was no longer moved as

formerly when she saw Coupeau at the edge of a roof, at forty or fifty feet above the pavement. She would not have pushed him off herself; but if he had fallen accidentally, in truth! it would have rid the face of the earth of one who was of little consequence. The days when the flames burnt fiercely, she lamented that it appeared he was never going to be brought home on a stretcher! She was awaiting it. It would be her happiness they were bringing back to her. What use was he, that drunkard? To make her weep, to eat up all she possessed, to drive her to sin. Men so useless as he should be thrown as quickly as possible into the hole, and the polka of deliverance be danced over them. Nana read about all the accidents in the newspapers, with reflections that were unnatural for a girl. Her father had such luck, an omnibus had knocked him down one day without even sobering him. Would the beggar never hook it?

In the midst of this existence, maddened by misery, Gervaise suffered also from the hungry people she heard groaning around her. This corner of the house was the worst one, where three or four families seemed to have resolved not to have bread every day. Their doors might well be open, but they seldom sent out the smell of cooking. Along the passage there was the silence of starvation, and the walls sounded hollow, like empty stomachs. At times there rose the sound of thrashings, women weeping, the plaintive cries of hungry brats, families devouring themselves to deceive their appetites. Cramp in the throat was quite general, whilst they were all gaping through their wide-open mouths; and chests contracted through nothing but breathing that air in which the flies themselves could not have lived through want of food.

But what most awoke Gervaise's pity was father Bru, in his hole under the little staircase. He retired into it like a marmot, and rolled himself up in a ball so as to feel less cold. He remained for days on a heap of

straw without moving. Hunger no longer drove him out, for it was of no use to go and get up an appetite when nobody had invited him to dinner. Whenever he did not appear for three or four days, the neighbours would push his door open to see if it was all over. No, he lived on all the same; not much, but just a little—with one eye only. Even death seemed to be forgetting him. Directly Gervaise got hold of some bread, she would throw him a few crusts. If she was becoming bad, and detested men, because of her husband, she always sincerely pitied the animals; and old Bru, that poor fellow whom everybody left to die because he could no longer hold his brush, was like a dog to her, a beast past service, whose skin and fat even the knackers would not buy. It was quite a burden on her heart to know of his being continually there, on the other side of the passage, abandoned by God and man, nourishing himself solely on himself, returning to the size of a child, shrivelled and dried up like oranges which become hardened on mantel-shelves.

The laundress also suffered a great deal from the near proximity of Bazouge, the funeral mute. A simple partition, and a very thin one, separated the two rooms. He could not put a finger into his mouth without her hearing it. As soon as he came home of an evening, she, in spite of herself, followed everything he did. His black leather hat laid with a dull thud on the chest of drawers like a shovelful of earth; the black cloak hung up and rustling against the wall like the wings of some night bird; all the black toggery slung into the middle of the room, and filling it with the trappings of mourning. She heard him stamping about, felt nervous at the least movement, and was quite startled if he knocked against the furniture, or shook any of his crockery. This awful drunkard was her pre-occupation, filling her with a secret fear, mixed up with a desire to know. He, jolly, his craving satisfied every day, his head all upside down, coughed, sang "Mother Godichin," made use of many

slang expressions, and fought with the four walls before finding his bed. And she remained quite pale, asking herself whatever he could be up to. She imagined the most atrocious things. She got it into her head that he must have brought a corpse home, and was placing it away under his bedstead. Good heavens! the newspapers had related something of the kind—an undertaker's mute, who collected the coffins of little children in his house, so as to save himself trouble, and to make only one journey to the cemetery.

One thing was certain, the moment Bazouge arrived, a smell of death seemed to pass through the partition. One might have thought oneself lodging against the Pere-Lachaise cemetery, right in the kingdom of moles. He was frightful, the charnel wretch, continually laughing all by himself, as though his profession made him lively. Even when he had finished his kick-up, and had laid himself on his back, he snored in a manner so extraordinary that it caused the laundress to hold her breath. For hours she listened attentively, with an idea that funerals were passing through her neighbour's room.

And the worst of it was that, in spite of her terrors, something incited Gervaise to put her ear to the wall, to find out more exactly what was taking place. Bazouge had the same effect on her as handsome men have on good women: they would like to touch them, but they dare not, their bringings up keeping them back. Well, if fear had not kept her back, Gervaise would have liked to have handled death, to see what it was like. She became so odd at times, holding her breath, listening attentively, expecting to unravel the secret through one of Bazouge's movements, that Coupeau would ask her, chuckling, if she had a taste for the mute next door. She got angry, and talked of moving, the close proximity of this neighbour was so hateful to her; and yet, as soon as the old fellow arrived, smelling like a cemetery, she became wrapped again in her reflections, with the agitated and timorous air of a wife who thinks of passing

a knife through the marriage contract. Had he not twice offered to pack her up, and carry her off with him to some place where the enjoyment of sleep is so great, that in a moment one forgets all one's miseries? Perhaps it was really very sweet. Little by little the temptation to taste it became stronger. She would have liked to have tried it for a fortnight or a month. Oh! to sleep a month, especially in winter, the term month, when the troubles of life were killing her. But it was not possible—one must sleep for ever, if one commenced to sleep for an hour; and the thought of this froze her, her desire for death departed before the eternal and stern friendship which the earth demanded.

However, one evening in January, she knocked with both her fists against the partition. She had passed a fearful week, hustled by everyone, without a sou, and utterly bereft of courage. That evening she was not at all well; she shivered with fever, and seemed to see flames dancing about her. Then, instead of throwing herself out of the window, as she had at one moment thought of doing, she set to knocking and calling,—

“Father Bazouge! Father Bazouge!”

The mute was taking off his shoes and singing, “There were three lovely girls.” He had probably had a good day, for he appeared even more screwed than usual.

“Father Bazouge! Father Bazouge!” repeated Gervaise, raising her voice.

Did he not hear her then? She was ready to give herself at once; he might come and take her on his neck, and carry her off to the place to which he had taken his other women, the poor and the rich, whom he comforted. It pained her to hear his song, “There were three lovely girls,” because she discerned in it the disdain of a man who has too many mistresses.

“What is it? what is it?” stuttered Bazouge; “who’s unwell? We’re coming, little woman!”

But the sound of this husky voice awoke Gervaise as if from a night-mare. What had she done? she must

certainly have been hammering against the partition. Then she felt as though she had received a heavy blow across her back: fright contracted all the muscles of her body; she drew back, fancying she beheld the mute's fat hands passing through the wall to seize her by the scalp. No, no, she would not, she was not prepared. If she had knocked, it must have been with her elbow in turning over, without being aware of it. And a feeling of horror went up from her knees to her shoulders at the thought of seeing herself lugged along in the old fellow's arms, all stiff and her face as white as a plate.

"Well! is there no one there now?" resumed Bazouge, in the stillness. "Wait a moment, we're always ready to oblige the ladies."

"It's nothing, nothing," said the laundress at length, in a choking voice. "I don't require anything, thanks."

Whilst the mute fell asleep grumbling, she remained with anxiety listening to him, not daring to move for fear he should fancy that he again heard her knocking. She swore to be very careful now. She might be dying, she would not ask her neighbour for help. She promised herself this so as to reassure herself, for at certain moments she was still possessed by her terrible fancy, notwithstanding her fright.

In her corner of misery, in the midst of her cares and the cares of others, Gervaise had, however, a splendid example of courage in the home of her neighbours, the Bijards. Little Lalie, that chit of eight, about the size of two sou's worth of butter, looked after everything and kept the place as clean as a grown-up person could have done; and the work was rough; she had the care of two little monkeys, her brother Jules and her sister Henriette, children of three and five years old, whom she had to guard all day long, even whilst sweeping the place out or washing up the crockery.

Ever since Bijard had killed his wife with a kick in the stomach, Lalie had become the little mother of them all. Without saying a word, and of her own accord, she

filled the place of the one who had gone, to such a degree that her brute of a father, no doubt to complete the resemblance, now belaboured the daughter as he had formerly beat the mother. Whenever he came home drunk, he required women to massacre. He did not even observe that Lalie was quite little! he would not have belaboured an old skin harder. With a slap he covered her entire face, and the flesh was still so tender that the marks of his five fingers remained there for a couple of days. There were most shameful drubbings, kicks for a "yes" or a "no," a regular mad wolf springing on a poor little cat, timid and coaxing, so thin that the sight would make one weep, and who submitted to all this with a resigned look in her lovely eyes and without a murmur. No, Lalie never rebelled. She bowed her neck a little to protect her face; she kept in her cries, so as not to raise the house up. Then, when her father was fatigued with kicking her about from one corner of the room to another, she waited till she had regained sufficient strength to begin her work again, washed the children, made the soup, and did not leave a speck of dust on the furniture. It was part of her daily task to be beaten.

Gervaise cherished a great friendship for her little neighbour. She treated her as an equal, as one who knew life. Lalie had a pale and serious expression, with the look of a girl grown old. One might have imagined her to be thirty, on hearing her speak. She knew very well how to buy things, mend the clothes, attend to the home, and she spoke of the little ones as though she were really the mother of them. It made people smile to hear her talk thus at eight years old; and then they would feel a slight choking sensation and they would run off so as not to burst out crying. Gervaise drew the child towards her as much as she could, gave her all she could spare, food and old clothing. One day as she tried one of Nana's old dresses on her, she stood almost suffocated with anger to see her back covered with

bruises, her elbow still bleeding and the skin torn off,—all her innocent flesh martyred and sticking to the bones. Well! old Bazouge could get his box ready; she would not last long at that rate! But the child had begged the laundress not to say a word. She would not have her father troubled on her account. She defended him, declaring that he would not have been so wicked if he did not drink. He was mad; he did not know what he did. Oh! she pardoned him, because one ought to forgive madmen everything.

From that moment Gervaise watched, and determined to interfere whenever she heard Bijard coming upstairs. But on most occasions she only caught a smack for her share. When she entered their room in the day-time, she often found Lalie tied to the foot of the iron bedstead; it was an idea of the locksmith's, who, before going out, tied her legs and her body with some stout rope, no one being able to find out why—a mere mania of a brain disease by drink, just for the sake, no doubt, of tyrannising over the child when he was no longer there. Lalie, as stiff as a stake, with pins and needles in her legs, remained whole days at the post. She once even passed a night there, Bijard having forgot to come home. Whenever Gervaise, carried away by her indignation, spoke of unfastening her, she implored her not to disturb the rope, because her father became furious if he did not find the knots tied as he left them. It was really not at all unpleasant; it rested her; and she would say that with a smile, whilst her little cherub-like legs were swollen and lifeless. What vexed her was that being fastened to the bedstead did not advance the work, in face of the disorder of the household. Her father ought certainly to have invented something else. Yet she looked after her children, made them obey her, and called Henriette and Jules to her to have their faces washed. As her hands were free she knitted whilst waiting to be delivered, so as not to waste her time completely. And she suffered above all when Bijard

untied her. She crawled about for a good quarter of an hour on the ground, unable to stand up, because the blood no longer circulated.

The locksmith had also conceived another little game. He put sous in the frying-pan, then placed them on a corner of the mantelpiece; and he called Lalie, and told her to bring up two pounds of bread. The child took up the sous without suspicion, uttered a cry, and threw them on the ground, shaking her burnt hand. Then he flew into a passion. Who had saddled him with such a piece of carrion? She lost the money now? And he threatened to beat her to a jelly, if she did not pick the sous up at once. When the child hesitated she got a first warning, a smack of such force that it made her see thirty-six candles. Speechless, and with two big tears in the corners of her eyes, she would pick up the sous and go off, throwing them up and down in the palm of her hand to cool them.

No one would ever conceive the ferocious ideas which can spring from the depth of a drunkard's brain. One afternoon, for instance, Lalie, having put everything straight, was playing with the children. The window was open, there was a draught, and the wind blowing along the passage gently shook the door.

"It's Monsieur Hardy," the child was saying. "Come in, Monsieur Hardy. Pray be good enough to walk in." And she curtsied before the door; she bowed to the wind. Henriette and Jules, behind her, also bowed, delighted with the game, and splitting their sides with laughter, as though they were being tickled. She was quite rosy at seeing them so thoroughly amused, and even found some pleasure in it on her own account, which usually only happened to her on the thirty-sixth day of each month.

"Good-day, Monsieur Hardy. How do you do, Monsieur Hardy?"

But a rough hand pushed open the door, and Bijard entered. Then the scene was changed. Henriette and

Jules fell down right against the wall; whilst Lalie, terrified, remained standing in the very middle of a curtsey. The locksmith held in his hand a big waggoner's whip, quite new, with a long white wooden handle, and a leather thong, ending in a bit of fine whipcord. He laid this whip in a corner against the bed, and did not give the usual kick to the child, who was already making herself ready by presenting her back. A chuckle showed all his blackened teeth, and he was very lively, very drunk, his features lighted up by some idea that tickled him immensely.

"What's that?" said he. "You're playing the slut, you confounded young brat! I could hear you dancing about from downstairs. Now then, come here! Nearer, in God's name! and your face right opposite. Am I touching you, that you shake like a mass of giblets? Take my shoes off."

Lalie turned quite pale again, and wondering at not receiving her spanking, took his shoes off. He had seated himself on the edge of the bed. He lay down with his clothes on, and remained with his eyes open, watching the child as she moved about the room. She busied herself with one thing and another, gradually becoming bewildered beneath his glance, her limbs overcome by such a terror that she ended by breaking a cup. Then, without moving himself, he took hold of the whip and showed it to her.

"I say, little calf, look at this. It's a gift to you. Yes, it's another fifty sous you've cost me. With this playing I shall no longer be obliged to run about, and it'll be no use your getting away into the corners. Will you try it? Ah! you break the cups! Now then, houp la! Dance away now, make your curtsies to Monsieur Hardy!"

He did not even raise himself, but lay flat on his back, his head buried in his pillow making the big whip crack about the room, with the nose of a postillion setting off his horses. Then, lowering his arm, he lashed Lalie in

the middle of the body, twisting the whip round her, and unwinding it again as though she were a top. She fell, and tried to escape on all fours; but he lashed her again, and set her once more on her feet.

"Gee up, gee up!" yelled he. "It's the donkey race! Eh, it'll be jolly this of a morning in winter. I can lie comfortably without getting cold or hurting my chilblains and catch the calves from a distance. In that corner there, a hit, you brat! And in that other corner, a hit again! And in that one, another hit. Ah! if you crawl under the bed I'll smack you with the handle. Gee up, you slut! gee up! gee up!"

A slight foam came to his lips, his yellow eyes were starting from their black orbits. Lalie, maddened, howling, jumped to the four corners of the room, curled herself up on the floor, and held to the walls; but the sharp lash at the end of the big whip caught her everywhere, cracking against her ears with the noise of fireworks, streaking her flesh with long burning wheals. A regular dance of an animal being taught its tricks. This poor little cat waltzed. It was a sight to be seen! her heels in the air like little girls playing at skipping-ropes, and crying "Faster!" She was all out of breath, rebounding like an india-rubber ball, letting herself be beaten, unable to see, or any longer to seek, a shelter. And her wolf of a father triumphed, calling her bad, asking her if she had had enough, and whether she understood thoroughly now that she was from that moment to give up all hope of escaping from him.

But Gervaise suddenly entered the room, attracted by the child's howls. On witnessing such a scene she was seized with a furious indignation.

"Ah! the beast of a man," cried she. "Will you leave her alone, you brigand? I'll call the police."

Bijard growled like an animal being disturbed, and stuttered,—

"Look here now, Limper, just mind your own business a little. Perhaps I ought to put gloves on

when I stir her up. It's merely to keep her active,—as you can see,—simply to show her that I've a long arm."

And he delivered a final lash with the whip, which caught Lalie across the face. The upper lip was cut, the blood flowed. Gervaise had seized a chair, and was about to fall on the locksmith; but the little girl held her hands towards her imploringly, saying that it was nothing, and that it was all over. She wiped away the blood with a corner of her apron, and quieted the children, who were sobbing bitterly, as though they had received all the blows of the whip.

Whenever Gervaise thought of Lalie, she no longer dared complain. She would have liked to have the courage of that child of eight, who endured in herself alone as much as all the other women of that staircase put together. She had seen her living on nothing but dry bread for three months, not even eating enough crusts to satisfy her hunger, and so thin and weak that she had to cling to the walls when she moved about; and when she took her secretly any bits of meat she had left, she felt her heart melt as she watched her eat, shedding big silent tears the while, and only swallowing very tiny pieces because her contracted throat could scarcely admit the food. Always tender and devoted in spite of that, with a reasonableness beyond her years, she performed her duties of little mother to the extent of dying of her maternity, awakened too soon in her childhood's frail innocence. And Gervaise took an example of suffering and forgiveness from this dear creature, trying to learn from her how to hide her martyrdom. Lalie only retained her silent look her big, black resigned eyes, in the depths of which one could divine a night of agony and misery. Never a word, nothing except that her big black eyes opened wide.

In the Coupeaus' home the "vitriol" of the Assommoir was also beginning its ravages. The laundress saw the hour drawing near when her husband would, like Bijard, take a whip to lead the dance; and the misfortune which

was threatening her, naturally enabled her to feel that which had befallen the child all the more. Yes, Coupeau was spinning a vile thread. The time was over when vitriol gave him a colour. He could no longer slap his body and strut about, saying that the confounded stuff fattened him, for his bad yellow fat of the first years had melted away, and he was becoming dried up and scraggy, of a leaden hue variegated with the green tints of a corpse rotting in a pond. His appetite was also gone. Little by little he had lost the taste for bread, he had even reached the point of being disturbed at the sight of his meat. One might have placed the most delicious stew before him! his stomach was barred against it; his inert teeth refused to chew. To keep himself up he needed his pint of brandy a day. It was his ration, his meat and drink, the only food he could digest. In the morning, whenever he jumped out of bed, he remained a full quarter of an hour bent in two, coughing and cracking his bones, holding his head, and getting quit of the phlegm, bitter as gall, which swept his throat. That never missed coming. •

Coupeau never got steady on his legs till after his first glass of comfort, a real remedy, the fire of which cauterised his interior; during the day his strength returned. At first, he would feel a tickling like pins and needles in his hands and feet; and he would jest, relating that someone was having a lark with him, that he was sure his "missus" put horse-hair between the sheets. Then his legs would become heavy, the tickling sensation would end by turning into the most abominable cramp, which gripped his flesh as though in a vice. That, though, did not seem very funny. He no longer laughed, stopped short on the pavement in a bewildered way, with a singing in his ears, and his eyes blinded with sparks. Everything appeared to him yellow, the houses danced, and he reeled about for three seconds, with the fear of falling on the ground. At other times, while the sun was shining brightly on his back, he would

shiver, as though iced water had been poured down his shoulders. What annoyed him most was a slight trembling of his hands; his right hand especially must have been guilty of something bad, it suffered from so many nightmares. God's name! was he then no longer a man? He was becoming an old woman! He furiously strained his muscles, he seized hold of his glass and declared that he would hold it perfectly steady, as with a hand of marble; but, in spite of his efforts, the glass danced about, jumped into the right, then to the left, with a hurried and regular trembling movement. Then, in a rage, he emptied it into his throat, yelling that he would need dozens like it, and afterwards he would undertake to carry a cask without so much as moving a finger. Gervaise, on the other hand, told him to give up drink, if he wished to cease shaking; and he laughed at her, emptying quarts until he felt the sensation again, flying into a rage, and accusing the omnibuses that were passing of shaking up his liquor.

In the month of March, Coupeau returned home one evening wet to the bones. He had come with Mes-Bottes from Montrouge, where they had had a tuck-in of eel soup, and he had walked through a heavy shower from the Barriere des Fourneaux to the Barriere Poissonniere, a good long way. During the night he was seized with a fit of coughing. He was very flushed, suffering from a violent fever, and panting like a broken bellows. When the Boches' doctor saw him in the morning, and listened against his back, he shook his head, and drew Gervaise apart to advise her to have her husband at once taken to the hospital. Coupeau had caught inflammation of the lungs.

Gervaise did not seem to vex herself greatly. At one time she would rather have been chopped into pieces than confide her old man to the sawbones. After the accident in the Rue de la Nation, she had eaten up their savings in nursing him. But beautiful sentiments disappear when men take to wallowing in the mire. No,

no, she did not intend to be so foolish as that again. They might take him and never bring him back; she would thank them with her heart. Yet, when the litter arrived, and Coupeau was put into it like an article of furniture, she became quite pale and bit her lips; and if she grumbled and still said it was a good thing, her heart was no longer in her words. Had she possessed ten francs she would not have let him go.

She accompanied him to the Lariboisiere, saw the nurses put him to bed at the end of a large apartment, where the patients in a row, looking like corpses, raised themselves up, and followed with their eyes the comrade who had just been brought in. There was a considerable amount of death hanging about the place, a suffocating odour of fever, and the consumptive music sufficient to make you ill for a month; without counting that the room had the look of a diminutive Pere-Lachaise cemetery, fringed by its white beds, a regular alley of tombstones. Then, as Coupeau remained flat on the pillow, Gervaise went off without finding a word to say, and having nothing, unfortunately, in her pocket to ease him. Outside, in front of the hospital, she turned round and gave a last glance at the edifice. And she thought of former days, when Coupeau, perched up there on the edge of the gutters, laid his sheets of zinc whilst he sang in the sunshine. He did not drink then; he had the skin of a girl. She, from her window at the Hotel Boncœur, sought for him, and beheld him right in the middle of the sky; and they both waved their handkerchiefs, sending kisses to each other by telegraph. Yes, Coupeau had worked up there, and without the least conception that he was working for himself. Now he was no longer on the roofs like a jovial and dissolute sparrow. He was beneath them; he had built his nest in the hospital, and with his rough hide he had come there to croak. Ah, God! how far off their days of love seemed then.

On the second day after when Gervaise called to get

some news of him, she found the bed empty. A sister of charity told her that they had been compelled to remove her husband to 'the Asylum of Sainte-Anne, because the day before he had all at once gone crazy. Oh! a complete leave-taking of his senses; attempts to crack his skull against the wall; howls which prevented the other patients from sleeping. It all arose from drink, it seemed. The drink, which had been brewing in his body, had taken advantage the moment the inflammation of the lungs had laid him on his back without strength, to attack him and wring his nerves. The laundress went home in a state of distraction. Her old man had gone mad now! Life would become very strange if they let him out. Nana exclaimed that he ought to be left at the asylum, because otherwise he would end by murdering them both.

Gervaise could not go to Sainte-Anne until the Sunday. 'It was a tremendous journey. Fortunately, the omnibus from the Boulevard Rochechouart to La Glaciere passed close by the asylum. She went down the Rue de la Sante, buying two oranges on her way so as not to arrive with empty hands. It was another monumental building, with grey courtyards, endless corridors, and a smell of rank medicaments, which did not inspire much liveliness. But when they had admitted her into a cell, she was much surprised to find Coupeau almost jolly. He was just then sitting on the throne, a clean wooden case; and they both laughed at her discovering him in this position. Well, one knows what an invalid is. He squatted there like a pope, with his prudence of other days. Oh! he was better since he could do this.

"And the inflammation?" asked the laundress.

"Gone!" replied he. "They cured it by a turn of the wrist. I still cough a little, but that's all that is left of it."

Then when he was leaving the throne to get back into his bed, he jested once more.

And they laughed still louder. At heart they felt

joyful. It was by way of showing their contentment without a number of phrases that they thus joked together. One must have had to do with patients to know the pleasure they feel at seeing all their functions at work again.

When he was in bed, she gave him the two oranges, and this filled him with emotion. He was becoming quite agreeable again ever since he had had nothing but infusion to drink, and could not leave his substance on the counters of public-houses. She ended by venturing to speak to him about his violent attack, astonished at hearing him reason as in the good old times.

"Ah, yes," said he, joking at his own expense; "I talked a fearful lot of nonsense. Just fancy I saw rats, and ran about on all fours to put a grain of salt on their tails. And you, you called to me, men were trying to kill you. In fact, all sorts of stupid things, ghosts in broad daylight. Oh! I remember it well, my nut's still solid. Now it's over, I dream a little when I'm asleep. I have nightmares, but everybody has nightmares."

Gervaise stayed with him until the evening. When the house surgeon came, at the six o'clock inspection, he made him spread out his hands; they hardly trembled at all, scarcely a quiver at the tips of the fingers. However, as night came on, Coupeau was little by little seized with uneasiness. He twice sat up in bed, looking on the ground and in the dark corners of the room. All at once, he thrust out an arm, and appeared to crush some animal against the wall.

"What is it?" asked Gervaise, terrified.

"The rats, the rats," murmured he.

Then, after a pause, gliding into sleep, he tossed about, uttering disconnected phrases. "Name of God! they're tearing my skin!—Oh! the beasts!—Keep steady! hold your skirts tight round you! take care of that bloke behind you!—Thunder and blazes! she's down, and the scoundrels laugh!—Cowardly muffs! blackguards! brigands!"

He dealt blows into space, caught hold of his blanket, and rolled it into a bundle against his chest, as if to protect it from the violence of the bearded men whom he beheld. Then, an attendant having hurried to the spot, Gervaise withdrew, quite frozen by the scene. However, when she came back, a few days later, she found Coupeau completely cured. Even the nightmares had left him; he could sleep his ten hours together as peacefully as a child, and without stirring a limb. So his wife was allowed to take him away. Only, the house surgeon gave him the usual good counsel when he left, and advised him to follow it. If he recommenced drinking, he would again break down, and would end by croaking. Yes, it solely depended upon himself. He had seen how comfortable and agreeable one could become when one did not get drunk. Well, he must continue at home the sensible life he had led at Saint-Anne, fancy himself under lock and key, and that dram-shops no longer existed.

"The gentleman's right," said Gervaise, in the omnibus which was taking them back to the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or.

"Of course he's right," answered Coupeau.

Then, after reflecting a moment, he went on,—

"Oh! you know, a little glass now and again can't kill a man: it helps digestion."

And that same evening he swallowed a glass of bad spirits, just to keep his stomach in order. For eight days he was pretty reasonable. He was a great coward at heart; he had no wish to end his days in the Bicetre lunatic asylum. But his passion got the better of him; the first small glass led him, in spite of himself, to a second, to a third, and to a fourth; and, at the end of a fortnight, he had got back to his old allowance, a pint of "vitriol" a day. Gervaise, exasperated, could have thrashed him. To think that she has been stupid enough to dream once more of leading a decent life, when she had seen him at the asylum in full possession of his good sense! Another joyful hour flown, the last one, no doubt.

Oh ! now, as nothing could reclaim him, not even the terror of his near death, she swore she would no longer annoy herself about it ; the home might be all at sixes and sevens, she did not care a hang ; and she talked of taking her pleasure wherever she found it.

Then the "hell" began again, a life sinking deeper into the gutter, without a corner of hope opening on to a better season. Nana, whenever her father smacked her, furiously asked why the old horse was not at the hospital. She was waiting for the time when she would be making money, she would say, to treat him to brandy, and make him go off the hooks quicker. Gervaise, on her side, got into a fury one day when Coupeau was regretting their marriage. Ah ! she had got herself picked up from the pavement, wheedling him by her "good-girl" ways. In the name of dogs ! he had a rare impudence. So many words, so many lies. She did not desire to have anything to do with him, that was the truth. He dragged himself at her feet to make her consent, whilst she was advising him to reflect on the matter well. And if it was all to come over again, she would say "no" a thousand times. She would sooner have an arm cut off. Yes, she had seen the moon before him ; but a woman who has seen the moon, and who is a worker, is worth more than a sluggard of a man who soils his honour and that of his family in all the drinking-shops. That day, for the first time, the Coupeaus went in for a general smashing, and they beat each other so badly that an old umbrella and the broom were broken.

And Gervaise kept her word. She sank lower than ever ; she missed going to her work oftener, gossiped for whole days, and became as soft as a rag whenever she had any work to do. If a thing fell from her hands, it might remain on the floor ; it was certainly not she who would have bent down to pick it up. She intended to save her bacon. She took her ease, and never handled a broom except when the accumulation of filth almost upset her. The Lorilleux now affected to hold something

to their noses whenever they passed her room; the stench was poisonous, they said. They lived at the end of the passage, out of the way of all these miseries which filled this corner of the house with complainings, locking themselves in so as not to have to lend twenty sou pieces. Oh! good-hearted folks, neighbours awfully obliging! yes, "it was the cat!" One had only to knock and ask for a light, or a pinch of salt, or a jug of water, one was certain of getting the door banged in one's face. With all that they had vipers' tongues. They cried everywhere that they never occupied themselves with other people, whenever it was a question of helping their neighbour; but they did so from morning to night the moment they had a chance of pulling anyone to pieces. With the door bolted and a rug hung up to cover the chinks and the key-hole, they would treat themselves to a spiteful gossip, without quitting their gold wire for a moment.

The fall of the Hobbler especially made them purr the entire day, like cats being stroked. What poverty, what a pull-down, my friends! They watched her when she went for her provisions, and laughed to themselves at the little bit of bread which she brought back under her apron. They calculated the days when she would have to dance before the empty cupboard. They knew the thickness of the dust in her house, the number of dirty plates left lying about, each one of the growing abandonments of misery and idleness. And her dresses too, disgusting tatters which even a rag-picker would not have handled. Oh, ye gods! it was raining queerly on this beautiful blonde's finery, this hussy who used once to wriggle about so smartly in her lovely blue shop. That was where the love of dissipating, of wantonising, and of gorging brought everyone.

Gervaise, who had an idea of the way in which they referred to her, would take her shoes off, and place her ear against their door; but the rug kept her from hearing. She was heartily sick of them; she continued to speak to them to avoid remarks, though expecting nothing but

unpleasantness from such objectionable persons, but no longer having force even to give them as much as they gave her, and to cast them off like a package of abuse. And, besides, she only wanted her own pleasure, to sit in a bundle twirling her thumbs, and only moving when it was a question of amusing herself, nothing more.

On Saturday, Coupeau had promised to take her to the circus. It was well worth while shaking oneself up a little to see ladies galloping along on horses and jumping through paper hoops. Coupeau had just completed a fortnight's work; he could well spare a couple of francs; and they had also arranged to dine out, Nana having to work very late that evening at her employer's because of some pressing order. But at seven o'clock there was no Coupeau; at eight o'clock he had not arrived. Gervaise was in a rage. He was certainly squandering his earnings with his comrades at the dram-shops of the district. She had washed a cap, and had been slaving since the morning over the holes of an old dress, wishing to look respectable. At last, towards nine o'clock, feeling hungry, her face purple with anger, she resolved to go down and look for Coupeau.

"Is it your husband you want?" called Madame Boche, when she caught sight of her looking very displeased. "He's at old Colombe's; Boche has just been having some cherry brandy with him."

She returned her thanks, and moved stiffly along the pavement with the resolution to fly at Coupeau's eyes. A fine rain was falling, which made the walk more uncomfortable still. But when she reached the Assommoir, the fear of receiving the thrashing herself, if she bothered her husband, suddenly calmed her and made her prudent. The shop was ablaze with the lighted gas, the flames of which were as brilliant as suns, and the bottles and jars lit up the walls with their coloured glass. She stood there a moment, stretching her neck, her eyes close to the window, between two bottles, placed there for show, watching Coupeau, who was away at the back; he was

sitting with some comrades at a little zinc table, all of them looking vague and blue in the tobacco smoke ; and, as one could not hear them yelling, it created a droll effect to see them gesticulating, with their chins thrust forward, and their eyes starting out of their heads. Good heavens ! was it really possible that men could leave their wives and their homes to shut themselves up thus in a hole where they were stifling ?

The rain trickled down her neck ; she drew herself up, and went off to the exterior Boulevard, reflecting deeply, and not daring to enter. Ah, well ! Coupeau would have welcomed her in a pleasant way, he who objected to be watched. Besides, it really scarcely seemed to her the proper place for a respectable woman. However, beneath the wet trees a slight shiver passed over her, and whilst she still hesitated, she could not help thinking that she was about to catch some serious illness. Twice she went back and stood before the shop window, her eyes again fixed to the glass, annoyed at still beholding those confounded drunkards under cover, and yelling and drinking. The light of the Assommoir was reflected in the puddles on the pavement, which simmered with little bubbles. She hastened off and floundered about in them, directly the door opened and shut with the clang of its brass facings. At length she called herself too foolish, and, pushing open the door, she walked straight up to the table where Coupeau was. After all, it was her husband she came to ask for, was it not ? and she was authorised in doing so, for he had promised to take her to the circus that evening. So much the worse ; she had no desire to melt like a cake of soap out on the pavement.

"Hallo, it's you, old woman !" exclaimed the zinc-worker, a chuckle half strangling him. "Ah, that's a good joke, by Jove ! Eh ! Isn't it a good joke, now ?"

They all laughed, Mes-Bottes, Bibi-the-Smoker, and Salted-Mouth, *alias* Drink-without-Thirst. Yes, they all thought it a good joke, but they did not explain why. Gervaise remained standing, feeling a little stupefied.

Coupeau seemed to her to be in a pleasant humour, so she ventured to say,—

“You know we have somewhere to go. We must look alive. We shall still be in time to see something.”

“I can’t get up; I’m glued; oh! without a joke,” resumed Coupeau, who went on laughing. “Try, just to satisfy yourself; pull my arm with all your strength! harder than that, she! tug away. You see, it’s that ass, father Colombe, who’s screwed me to his seat.”

Gervaise had humoured him at this game; and, when she let go his arm, the comrades thought the jest so good that they wriggled up against one another, brawling and rubbing their shoulders like donkeys who are being thrashed. The zinc-worker’s mouth was stretched by such a laugh that you could see right down his throat.

• “You great goose,” he said at length, “you can surely sit down a minute. We’re better here than splashing about outside. Well, yes, I didn’t come home. I had business to attend to. Though you may pull a long face, it won’t change things. Make room you others.”

“If madame would accept my knees, she would find them softer than the bench,” gallantly said Mes-Bottes.

Gervaise, not desiring to attract attention, took a chair and sat down two or three steps from the table. She looked at what the men were drinking—some powerful brandy, which shone like gold in the glasses; a little of it had been spilt upon the table, and Salted-Mouth, *alias* Drink-without-Thirst, dipped his finger in it, whilst talking, and wrote a woman’s name—“Eulalie,” in large letters. She observed that Bibi-the-Smoker looked fearfully jaded, and thinner than a hundredweight of nails. Mes-Bottes’ nose was in full bloom, a true purple Burgundy dahlia. They were all four of them very dirty, with their filthy bristly beards smelling as if they had been steeped in dirty water, their ragged blouses, and their black paws, whose nails were in mourning. But, really, one might all the same be seen in their company, for though they had been swilling ever since six o’clock, they still were quite

straight enough, and were, in fact, just lively. Gervaise saw two others at the counter having a gargle; they were so tight that they threw their glassfuls under their chins and soaked their shirts, imagining they were rinsing their mouths. Stout Father Colombe, thrusting out his enormous arms, the peace-preservers of his establishment, quietly poured out the rounds.

The atmosphere was very hot; the smoke from the pipes went up in the blinding glare of the gas, amidst which it rolled about like dust, drowning the customers in a gradually thickening mist; and from this cloud there came forth a deafening and confused uproar, cracked voices, clinking of glasses, oaths and blows sounding like detonations. So Gervaise put on a very queer face, for such a sight is not amusing to a woman, especially when she is not used to it; she was stifling, her eyes smarting, and her head already feeling heavy from the alcoholic fumes which the whole room exhaled. Then she suddenly felt the sensation of something more unpleasant still behind her back. She turned round and saw the still, the machine for making drunkards, working under the glass roof of the narrow courtyard with the profound trepidation of its hellish cookery. In the evenings the copper parts looked more mournful than ever, lit up only on their rounded surface with one big red star; and the shadow of the apparatus on the wall at the back formed most abominable figures, bodies with tails, monsters opening their jaws as though to gobble everyone up.

"I say, mother Good-gab, don't make any of your faces!" cried Coupeau. "To the devil, you know, with all dampers! What'll you drink?"

"Nothing, certainly," replied the laundress. "I haven't dined yet."

"Well, that's all the more reason for having a glass; a drop of something keeps one up."

But as she still retained her sullen expression, Mes-Bottes again did the gallant.

"Madame probably likes sweet things," murmured he.

"I like men who don't get drunk," answered she, getting angry. "Yes, I like a fellow who brings home his wages, and who keeps his word when he makes a promise."

"Ah! it's that which annoys you?" said the zinc-worker, without ceasing to chuckle. "You want your share. Then, big stupid, why do you refuse a drink? Take it, it's so much of what is owed you."

She looked at him fixedly, in a serious manner, a wrinkle marking her forehead with a black line. And she slowly replied,—

"Well, now, you're right, it's a good idea. That way, we can drink up the cash together."

Bibi-the-Smoker rose from his seat to fetch her a glass of aniseed. She drew her chair up to the table. Whilst she was sipping her aniseed, a remembrance suddenly crossed her mind; she recollected the plum she had taken with Coupeau near the door, in the old days when he was courting her. At that time she used to leave the juice of fruits preserved in brandy. And now, here was she, going back to liqueurs. Oh, she knew herself well, she had not two liards of will. One would only need to have given her a whacking across the back to have made her regularly wallow in drink. The aniseed even seemed to her very good, perhaps a little too sweet and sickening. And she licked her glass, whilst listening to Salted-Mouth, *alias* Drink-without-Thirst, relating his love affairs with plump Eulalie, she who sold fish about the streets, a very cunning woman, an individual who scented him in the pubs, whilst pushing her barrow along the road; it was useless for his comrades to warn him and hide him; she often caught him—she had even, only the day before given him a smack in the face, just to remind him not to miss the workshop. That, at least, was droll enough.

Bibi-the-smoker and Mes-Bottes, splitting with laughter, were tapping Gervaise's shoulders, who at last laughed, as though being tickled, and in spite of herself, and they

advised her to take a lesson from plump Eulalie, and to bring her irons and iron Coupeau's ears on the zinc tables of the pubs.

"Ah, well, thanks!" cried Coupeau, turning upside down the glass his wife had emptied, "you pump it out pretty well. Only look, she doesn't take long over it."

"Madame will take another?" asked Salted-Mouth, *alias* Drink-without-Thirst.

No, she had had sufficient. Yet she hesitated. The aniseed was warming her heart. She would rather have taken something harder to cure her stomach. And she threw side-glances at the drunkard-producing machine behind her. That awful pot, as round as a tinker's fat wife, with its nose so long and twisted, sent a shiver across her shoulders—a fear mingled with a desire. A fine source of poison, an operation which should have been concealed in a cellar, it was so shameless and abominable! But nevertheless she would have liked to have poked her nose inside it, to have sniffed the odour; have tasted the stuff, though the skin might have peeled off her burnt tongue like the rind from an orange.

"What's that you're drinking?" she asked slyly of the men, her eyes lit up by the beautiful golden colour of their glasses.

"That, old girl," answered Coupeau, "is papa Colombe's camphor. Don't be a fool, now, and we'll let you taste it."

And when they had brought her a glass of the "vitriol," and her jaws had contracted at the first mouthful, the zinc-worker went on, slapping his thighs,—

"Ha! it tickles your gullet! Drink it off at once. Each glassful takes six francs from the doctor's pocket."

At the second glass, Gervaise no longer felt the hunger which had been tormenting her. Now she had been reconciled to Coupeau, she did not refer to his having broken his word. They would go to the circus some other day; it was not so funny to see people galloping about on horses. There was no rain inside old

Colombe's, and if the money went in stomach-fire, one at least had it in one's body; one drank it limpid and shining like beautiful liquid gold. Ah! she was ready to send the whole world to get screwed if it liked. Life was not so pleasant after all! besides, it seemed some comfort to her to have her share in squandering the cash. As she was comfortable, why should she not remain? One might have a discharge of artillery; she did not care to budge, once she had settled down in a heap. She nursed herself in a pleasant warmth, her bodice sticking to her back, overcome by a feeling of comfort which benumbed her limbs. She laughed all to herself, her elbows on the table, her eyes looking forth vacantly, highly amused by two customers, a big heavy fellow and a dwarf, seated at a neighbouring table, who were kissing each other like loaves of bread, they were so drunk. Yes, she laughed at the Assommoir, at old Colombe's full moon, a regular bladder of lard, at the customers smoking their old pipes, yelling and spitting, as well as at the big flames of gas which lighted up the looking-glasses and the bottles of liqueurs. The smell no longer annoyed her; on the contrary, it tickled her nose, and she thought it very nice. Her eyes slightly closed, whilst she breathed very slowly, without the least feeling of suffocation, tasting the enjoyment of the gentle sleepiness which was overcoming her. Then, after her third glass, she let her chin fall on her hands; she could only see Coupeau and his comrades, and she remained nose to nose with them, quite close, her cheeks heated by their breath, looking at their dirty beards as though she had been counting the hairs. They were all very screwed by this time. Mes-Bottes was drivelling his pipe between his teeth, with the dumb and grave air of a dozing ox. Bibi-the-Smoker was relating a tale—the way in which he emptied a bottle at a draught, giving it such a kiss, that one instantly saw its bottom. Meanwhile Salted-Mouth, *alias* Drink-without-Thirst, had gone and fetched the wheel of fortune from the counter, and was playing with Coupeau for drinks.

"Two hundred ! You're lucky ; you get high numbers every time "

The needle of the wheel grated, and the figure of Fortune, a large red woman placed under glass, whirled round and round until it looked like a mere spot in the centre,—as if it had been a wine stain.

"Three hundred and fifty ! You must have been inside it, you rascally outsider ! Ah ! confound it ! I sha'n't play any more !"

And Gervaise became quite interested in the wheel of fortune. She was feeling confoundedly thirsty, and calling Mes-Bottes "my child." Behind her the machine for producing drunkards continued working, with its murmur of an underground stream ; and she despaired of ever stopping it, of exhausting it, taken with a sullen anger against it, feeling a desire to spring upon the big still, as upon some animal, to kick it with her heels and smash it to pièces. Everything seemed to become confused ; she felt herself seized by its copper claws, whilst the stream now flowed through her body.

Then the room danced round, the gas-jets seeming to shoot like stars. Gervaise was grey. She heard a furious wrangle between Salted-Mouth, *alias* Drink-without-Thirst, and that rascal old Colombe. There was a thief of a landlord who wanted one to pay for what one had not had ! One was not yet at Bondy All at once there was a scuffling, yells were heard, and tables were upset. It was father Colombe who was turning the party out, without the least hesitation, and in a turn of the wrist. On the other side of the door they blackguarded him, and called him scoundrel. It still rained, and blew icy cold. Gervaise lost Coupeau, found him, and then lost him again. She wished to go home ; she put out her hands and touched the shops to find her way. This sudden darkness surprised her very much. At the corner of the Rue des Poissonniers she sat down in the gutter under the impression she was at the wash-house. The water which flowed along caused her head to swim, and

made her very sick. At length she arrived. She passed stiffly before the doorkeeper's room, where she perfectly recognised the Lorilleux and the Poissons seated at the table, and who made grimaces of disgust when they saw her in that wretched state.

She never knew how she had got up the six flights of stairs. Just as she was turning into the passage up at the top, little Lalie, who heard her footstep, hastened to meet her, opening her arms to caress her friend, and saying with a smile,—

“Madame Gervaise, papa has not yet returned; just come and see my children sleeping Oh! they look so pretty.”

But, on observing the laundress's besotted face, she drew back, and trembled. She knew too well that brandy-laden breath, those pale eyes, that convulsed mouth. Then Gervaise stumbled past without speaking a word, whilst the child, standing on the threshold of her room, followed her with her dark eyes, grave and speechless.

CHAPTER XI.

NANA was growing up and becoming wild. At fifteen years old she had shot up like a calf, with a white skin, and was so plump, indeed, you might have called her a ball. Yes, such she was—fifteen years old, with all her teeth and no corset. A true sample of a girl's face, dipped in milk, a skin as soft as a peach, a funny nose, a rosy mouth, and eyes sparkling like tapers, which men would have liked to light their pipes at. Her lot of fair hair, the colour of fresh oats, seemed to have scattered gold dust over her temples, freckle-like, as it were, which gave her brow a sunny crown. Ah! a pretty doll, as the Lorilleux said.

She was over-developed for her age, and what made her particularly tempting was a wicked habit of protruding a little bit of her tongue between her white teeth. No doubt on seeing herself in the looking-glass she had thought she was very pretty like this; and so all day long she poked her tongue out of her mouth to be more attractive.

"Hide your lying tongue; keep it inside," cried her mother. And it would sometimes happen that Coupeau would mix himself in the matter, and give her a smack as he growled, "Take your red rag inside, will you!"

Nana showed herself quite a coquette. She bought such tight boots that she suffered martyrdom in St. Crispin's prison, and if people questioned her when she turned purple with pain, she answered that she had a stomach-ache, so as to avoid confessing her vanity.

When bread was scarce at home, it was difficult for her to smarten herself up. But she worked miracles, brought ribbons back from the workshop, and arranged her toilettes—dirty dresses set off with bows and puffs. The summer was the season of her greatest triumphs. With a cambric dress which had cost her six francs, she filled the whole district of the Goutte-d'Or with her fair beauty. Yes, she was known from the outer Boulevards to the Fortifications, and from the Chaussee de Clignancourt to the Graude Rue de La Chapelle. People called her "the little hen," for she was really as tender and as fresh looking as a chicken.

One dress, especially, suited her to perfection. It was covered with pink spots on a white ground, very simply made, and without any trimmings. The skirt, a little short, gave her feet free play. The loose open sleeves allowed her arms to display themselves to the elbows. In a dark corner of the stairs, so as to avoid a box on the ears from father Coupeau, she pinned the upper part of her bodice back in the shape of a heart, in view of showing her snow white neck and shadowy amber bosom. Nothing else, nothing but a pink ribbon tied round her fair hair—a ribbon, the ends of which waved over the nape of her neck. She looked as fresh as a bouquet of flowers, dressed like this, exhaling the perfume of youth, the scent which comes from the flesh of a child and a woman.

At this time, Sundays were her great days for meeting the crowd, all the men who passed by and made up to her. She waited the whole week for these times, tickled with little longings, stifling, and feeling the need of fresh air, of a stroll in the sunlight among the crowd of the faubourg, tricked out in its Sunday best. Early in the morning she began to dress, stopping for hours in front of the little piece of glass hanging over the chest of drawers; but as everyone in the house could see her through the window, her mother was often annoyed, and asked her if she wouldn't soon finish walking about as

naked as a parsnip. But with bare legs and dishevelled hair, with her night gown falling from her shoulders, she quietly continued plastering corkscrew ringlets over her forehead with sugared water, sewing buttons on to her boots or stitching her dress.

Ah ! she was just the very thing like that ! said father Coupeau, sneering and chaffing her, a real Magdalen-the-despairing ! She might have turned "savage woman" at a fair, and have shown herself for two sous. Indeed, she was adorable, white and dainty under her overhanging golden fleece, losing temper to the point that her skin turned pink, not daring to reply to her father, but cutting her thread with her teeth, with a quick furious jerk which shook with a quiver her plump but youthful form.

Then, as soon as breakfast was over she tripped downstairs into the courtyard. The warm peacefulness of Sunday was sending the house to sleep, the workshops were closed, the rooms yawned with their open windows, showing tables already laid for the evening meal, which awaited households engaged for the present in creating appetites on the Fortifications. One woman on the third floor was occupying her time in cleaning her room, rolling her bed about, disturbing the furniture and singing the same song for hours in a soft, tearful voice. Then, as work was hushed, in the midst of the empty, echoing courtyard, Nana, Pauline, and other big girls engaged in games of battledore and shuttlecock. They were five or six who had grown up together, and had become the queens of the house, dividing among them the glances of the gentlemen there. Whenever a man crossed the courtyard shrill laughter arose, and the rustle of starched skirts passed by like a gust of wind. Above them flamed the holiday air, burning and heavy, drowsily lazy as it were, and whitened by the dust that was scattered by the promenaders.

But the games were nothing but an excuse for them to make off. Suddenly stillness fell upon the house. The girls had glided out into the street and made for the

outer Boulevards. Then holding each other by the arms across the full breadth of the pavement, they went off, the whole six of them, clad in light colours, with ribbons tied around their bare heads. With bright eyes, darting stealthy glances through their half-closed eyelids, they observed everything, and constantly threw back their necks to laugh, displaying the fleshy part of their chins. Their line became broken in moments of especial gaiety provoked by some passing hunchback or some old woman waiting for her dog near the street posts; some of them then waited behind, and had to be dragged forward by the others; and meantime they wriggled their hips, curvetted and pranced in view of drawing notice, making their dresses crackle under their budding forms. The street belonged to them; they had grown up in it, pulling up their skirts alongside the shop-fronts. In the midst of the pale and slow-paced crowd, between the stumpy trees of the Boulevard, they straggled quickly onward from the Barriere Rochechouart to the Barriere Saint-Denis, knocking against the people they met, winding in zig-zag fashion through groups of bystanders, turning round and launching remarks in the midst of the fusée of their laughter. And their dresses hurried along, leaving behind them a trace of the insolence of youth: they displayed themselves in the open air, in the blaze of light, with something of coarseness, but as desirable and as tender as virgins returning with moist necks from the bath.

Nana took the middle, with her rose coloured dress all aglow in the sunlight. She gave her arm to Pauline, whose costume, yellow flower on a white ground, glared in similar fashion, dotted as it were with little flames. As they were the tallest of the band, the most womanlike and most impudent, they led the troop and drew themselves up with breasts well forward whenever they detected glances or could hear complimentary remarks. The others, the monkeys, extended right and left, puffing themselves out in order to draw attention. Young

workmen, about their twentieth year, in slovenly grey blouses, chatted slowly with them with crossed arms, puffing the smoke of their short pipes up their noses. But all this was of no consequence; these chaps had sprouted up on the pavement at the same time as themselves. Still amongst the number they had already made their choice. Pauline was always meeting Madame Gaudron's son, a seventeen-year-old carpenter, who treated her to apples; and Nana distinguished from one end of the street to the other, young Victor Fauconnier, the washerwoman's son, with whom she exchanged kisses in dark corners.

Then, when the sun set, the great delight of these monkeys was to stop and look at the mountebanks. Conjurors and strong men came about the place and spread threadbare carpets on the ground of the avenue. Loungers collected, and a circle formed, whilst the mountebank in the centre exercised his muscles under his faded tights. Nana and Pauline would remain standing for hours in the thickest part of the crowd. Their pretty fresh dresses became all creased and tumbled by rubbing against the men's coats and dirty blouses. Their bare arms, their bare necks, their bare heads grew heated amid the breathing of the men, in a mingled odour of wine and perspiration. And they laughed in full enjoyment, without disgust, but rosier rather, as if they had been on their native heath, so to speak.

The only thing that vexed them was to meet their fathers, especially when these had been drinking. But they watched and warned one another.

"I say, Nana," Pauline would suddenly cry out, "here comes father Coupeau!"

"Eh, he isn't drunk; oh, dear no, not at all," said Nana, greatly annoyed. "I'm going to hook it. I don't want him to shake me. Hallo, how he stumbles! Good heavens, if he would only break his neck!"

At other times, when Coupeau came straight up to her without giving her time to run off, she crouched down,

DRINK

and muttered,—“Hide me, then, you’ others: He’s looking for me, and he promised he’d knock my nut off if he caught me running about.”

Then, when the drunkard had passed them, she drew herself up again, and all the others followed her with bursts of laughter. He’ll find her—he will—he won’t. It was a true game at hide and seek. One day, however, Boche had followed Pauline, and caught her by both ears, and Coupeau had driven Nana home with kicks and cuffs.

When daylight disappeared, they took a last turn and went home in the pallid dusk, through the tired crowd. The dust had thickened in the atmosphere, paling the heavy sky. The Rue de la Goutte-d’Or might have been a corner of some provincial town with the housewives standing on the doorsteps, and their bursts of chatter disturbing the warm silence of the neighbourhood as no vehicles were running. The girls stopped for a little in the courtyard, took up their battledores, and tried to make believe they hadn’t budged from the spot. Then they went upstairs, manufacturing some story which they were often dispensed from repeating, as, for instance, when they found their parents absorbed in smacking one another because the soup had too much salt, or was not hot enough.

Nana was now a workgirl, and earned forty sous a day at Titreville’s place in the Rue du Caire, where she had served as apprentice. The Coupeaus had kept her there, so that she might remain under the eye of Madame Lerat, who had been forewoman in the workroom for ten years. In the mornings, when her mother looked at the cuckoo clock, off she went by herself, looking very smart, with her shoulders tightly confined in her old black dress, which was both too narrow and too short; and Madame Lerat had to observe the hour of her arrival, and tell it to Gervaise. She was allowed twenty minutes to go from the Rue de la Goutte-d’Or to the Rue du Caire, and it was enough, for these young misses have stag’s

legs. At times she arrived to the minute, but so red and so out of breath that she certainly had sped from the Barriere in ten minutes, after dawdling on the road beforehand. More commonly, however, she was seven or eight minutes late; and then she showed herself most coaxing towards her aunt till night time, looking at her with imploring eyes, and thus trying to affect her and induce her not to tell her father. Madame Lerat, who understood useful vagaries, did not tell the Coupeaus the truth, but she scolded Nana with interminable chatter, speaking of her responsibility and of the perils a young girl was exposed to in the streets of Paris.

"You see," she repeated, "you must tell me everything. I'm so fond of you that if any accident happened to you I should go and throw myself into the Seine. Do you hear, my little puss? If men talk to you, you must repeat everything to me without forgetting a single word—eh? Haven't they said anything to you as yet? Will you swear it?"

Nana thereupon laughed, twisting her mouth in a droll manner. No, no, men didn't talk to her. She walked too quickly, and besides, what could they have had to say to her? She had nothing to do with them; and assuming a simpleton's expression, she explained how it occurred that she was often late; she had stopped to look at some pictures in the shop windows, or else she had gone with Pauline to hear a story she knew. Folks could come after her if they did not believe her; she always kept to the pavement on the left-hand side, and ran along like a vehicle, overtaking all the other girls, and passing them by. To speak the truth, Madame Lerat had one day come upon her with her nose pointed upwards in the Rue du Petit-Carreau, while she was laughing, with three other girls of her own class, at a man who was shaving himself at a window; but when her aunt scolded her, she turned angry, and declared that she had just been into the baker's at the corner to buy a ha'penny roll.

"Oh, I look out, you needn't fear," said the widow to the Coupeaus. "I will answer to you for her as I would answer for myself."

The workroom at Titreville's was a large apartment on the first floor, with a broad work-table placed on trestles in the middle. Round the four walls, the plaster of which was visible in parts where the dirty yellowish-grey paper was torn off, there were several stands covered with old cardboard boxes, parcels, and patterns that had been thrown aside, under a thick coating of dust. The gas had left a mark like a daub of soot on the ceiling. The two windows opened so wide that, without leaving the work-table, the girls could see the people walking past on the pavement over the road.

Madame Lerat always arrived first, in view of setting an example. Then for a quarter of an hour the door swung to and fro, and all the workgirls straggled in, perspiring, with tumbled hair. One July morning Nana came in last, as very often occurred. "Ah me!" she said, "it won't be a pity when I have a carriage of my own." And without taking off her hat, one which she was tired of patching up, she went over to the window, and leant out, looking to the right and the left to see what was going on in the street.

"What are you looking at?" asked Madame Lerat, with an air of suspicion. "Did your father come with you?"

"No, you may be certain of that," answered Nana, coolly. "I'm looking at nothing—I'm looking—that it's awfully hot. It's quite enough to make anyone ill to make them run like that."

It was a suffocating hot morning. The workgirls had drawn down the Venetian blinds, between which they could spy out into the street; and they had at length begun to work on either side of the table, at the upper end of which sat Madame Lerat. They were eight in number, each with her pot of glue, pincers, tools, and curling stand before her. On the work table lay a mass

of wire, reels, cotton wool, green and brown paper, leaves and petals cut out of silk, satin or velvet. In the middle, in the neck of a large decanter, one flower-girl had thrust a little penny nosegay which had been fading on her breast since the day before.

"Ah! do you know," said Leonie, a pretty girl with dark hair, as she bent over her stand, curling the petals of a rose, "it appears that poor Caroline is awfully unhappy with that fellow who used to wait for her every evening."

Nana, who was engaged in cutting narrow bands of green paper, declared that this news did not surprise her in the least, for the fellow they spoke of was habitually unfaithful.

An undercurrent of gaiety spread through the workroom, and Madame Lerat found it necessary to make a show of severity.

Nana puffed out her cheeks as if to avoid bursting into laughter. Father, indeed! But all at once Leonie swiftly whispered,—“Eh, take care; here comes madame!”

And indeed Madame Titreville, a tall, withered-looking woman, now entered the workroom. As a rule she remained downstairs in the shop. The workgirls lived in fear of her, for she never jested. She went slowly round the work-table, over which every one now remained stooping, silent and as busy looking as possible. She called one workgirl a stupid, and made her begin a daisy over again. Then she went off as stiffly as she had come.

“Bow, wow!” repeated Nana, in the midst of a general growl.

“Young ladies, really, young ladies!” said Madame Lerat, trying to assume an air of severity. “You will oblige me to adopt measures——”

But she was not listened to, for they did not fear her. She showed herself too tolerant, tickled as it were by associating with those girls, who had eyes full of merriment, taking them aside to draw them out on the subject of their lovers, and telling them their fortunes with cards

when an end of the work table happened to be unencumbered. Her hard skin, her gendarme's carcase, vibrated with a gossip's dancing joy when any questionable subject was started.

Indeed, Nana completed a nice education in the workroom! No doubt she was already disposed to do wrong. But this finished the matter—associating with a lot of girls already *blase* with misery and vice. It was there that they all rotted together, just the story of the baskets of apples when there are rotten ones among them. No doubt they restrained themselves in the presence of strangers; they avoided evil expressions—in truth, they pretended to be well-brought-up young people. Only, nasty remarks were made in corners, in one another's ears, as fast as possible. Two of them could not remain together without at once twisting with laughter as they related some new story. Then in the evening they saw each other home, and confidences were made—stories calculated to set the hair on end, which delayed the girls on the pavement, and made them burn with desire in the midst of the elbowing crowd. For those who had so far remained decent like Nana, the workroom had a pernicious atmosphere replete with the odour of music-halls and nights badly spent, brought there by the vicious girls, in their slovenly fastened hair and their tumbled skirts—so tumbled indeed that the wearers seemed to have slept in them. Over the work-table, among the bright fragile artificial flowers, there passed a perverted breath typified by the idle languor that follows nights of vice, and by the dark circles around the hussies' eyes. Nana sniffed and intoxicated herself as it were when she felt at her side some girl who had already seen “the wolf.” For a long while she sat next to big Liza, who was said to expect soon to be a mother; and she was ever casting glowing glances at her neighbour. As for learning anything new, that was difficult. The little monkey knew everything, had learnt everything on the pavement of the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or.

"It makes one stifled," she said, approaching a window as if to draw the blind further down; but she leant forward and once more looked out both to right and left.

At the same instant Leonie, who was watching a man stationed on the foot-pavement over the way, exclaimed,—

"What's that old fellow about? He's been spying here for the last quarter of an hour."

"Some tom cat," said Madame Lerat. "Nana, will you come and sit down! I forbid your remaining at the window."

Nana took up the stems of some violets she was rolling, and the whole workroom occupied itself with this man. He was a well-dressed gentleman with a frock-coat on, and about fifty years old. He had a pale face, very serious and dignified in expression, framed round with a well-trimmed grey beard. He stayed for an hour in front of a herbologist's shop, fixing his eyes on the Venetian blinds of the workroom. The flower girls gave little bursts of laughter which were choked in the noise of the street, a while leaning forward, to all appearance busy with their work, they glanced aside so as not to lose sight of the gentleman.

"Ah!" remarked Leonie, "he wears glasses. He's a swell. He's certainly waiting for Augustine."

But Augustine, a tall, ugly, fair-haired girl, bitterly answered that she did not like old men; on hearing which Madame Lerat, jerking her head, answered with a smile full of underhand meaning.—

"You are wrong, my dear; the old one's are more tender."

At this moment Leonie's neighbour, a plump little body, whispered in her ear, and Leonie at once threw herself back on her chair, seized with a fit of noisy laughter, twisting about, looking at the gentleman and then laughing all the louder. "That's it. Oh! that's it," she stammered.

"What did she say? What did she say?" asked the whole workroom, burning with curiosity.

Leonie wiped the tears from her eyes without replying. When she became a little calmer she began curling her fingers once more, and said,—“Oh, never mind.”

They all insisted, but she shook her head, seized again with a gust of gaiety. Thereupon Augustine, her left-hand neighbour, begged her to whisper it to her; and finally Leonie agreed to do so, with her lips close to Augustine's ear. Augustine threw herself back and twisted about with convulsive laughter in her turn. Then she repeated the phrase to a girl next to her, and from ear to ear it travelled round the room in the midst of exclamations and stifled laughter. When they were all of them acquainted with Sophie's remark, they glanced at one another and burst out laughing together, although a little flushed and confused. Madame Lerat alone was not in the secret, and she felt very vexed.

“That's very impolite behaviour on your part, young ladies,” said she. “One should not whisper when other people are present. Something improper, no doubt! Ah! that's nice, isn't it?”

However, she did not venture to ask what it was that Sophie had said, in spite of her furious longing to learn it. But, for an instant, looking dignified, with her nose bent down, she regaled herself with the talk of the workgirls. And they mixed up everything with the gentleman who was waiting over the way. Ah! his ears must have tingled, and no mistake! They ended by saying some very senseless things in their anxiety to be witty. Still, this did not keep them from finding the pastime an amusing one, and excited, with sparkling eyes, they indulged in sillier remarks than ever. Madame Lerat had no occasion to scold, for no bad words were spoken.

You should have seen how Nana enjoyed this lark. No word with a double meaning escaped her. She herself launched some very rough ones, underscoring them with a movement of the chin, sitting back, and feeling

quite happy. Meantime, whilst she twisted about on her chair, she kept on preparing her violet stems with wonderful ease, and in less time than you might have rolled a cigarette. One movement to take a strip of green paper, and then, hallo ! the paper glided round the wire ; next a drop of gum on the top so as to affix the flower, and it was done—a fresh, delicate bit of green, fit to be placed on a lady's bosom. The dexterity was in the fingers, the girl's fingers, which were nimble and supple, double-jointed as it were. This was all she had been able to learn of the profession, and all the stems of the work-room were entrusted to her, so skilfully did she prepare them.

However, the gentleman over the way had gone away. The room grew calmer, and work went on in the sultry heat. „When twelve o'clock struck—meal-time—they 'll shook themselves up. Nana, who had hastened to the window again, declared she would do the errands if they liked. And Leonie ordered a penn'orth of shrimps, Augustine a lot of fried potatoes, Liza a bunch of radishes, Sophie a sausage. And then, as Nana was going down-stairs, Madame Lerat, who found her partiality for the window that morning rather curious, overtook her with her long legs.

“Wait a moment,” she said, “I'll go with you, I want to buy something too.”

In the passage below she observed the gentleman, stuck there like a candle, and exchanging glances with Nana. The little one flushed very red, and her aunt at once caught her by the arm and made her trot over the pavement, whilst he followed behind. Ah ! so the tom-cat had come to see Nana. Ah ! well ! it *was* nice indeed ! And then Madame Lerat hastily began to question her. Oh ! good heavens ! Nana didn't know ; he had only been following her for five days, but she could not put her nose out of doors without falling over him. She believed he was in business ; yes, a manufacturer of bone buttons. Madame Lerat was greatly im-

pressed. She turned round and glanced at the gentleman out of the corner of her eye.

"One can see he's got a purse," she muttered. "Listen to me, little pussy; you must tell me everything. You have nothing more to fear now."

Whilst speaking, they hurried from shop to shop—to the pork butcher's, fruiterer's, the cook shop; and the errands, in greasy papers were piled up in their hands. But they remained amiable, twisting about and casting bright glances behind them with bursts of gay laughter. Madame Lerat herself tried to do the graceful, acting the young girl, on account of the button manufacturer who was still coming after them.

"He is very distinguished looking," she declared, as they went back into the passage. "I hope he has honourable intentions."

• Then, as they were going upstairs, she suddenly appeared to recollect something.

"By the way, what were the girls whispering to each other—you know—what Sophie said?"

Nana did not stand on any ceremony. Only she, caught Madame Lerat by the neck and made her go down a couple of steps, for, really, the remark she spoke of could not be repeated aloud, even on a staircase. And then she whispered it. Was that all? In any case, she knew what it was now, and was no longer devoured by curiosity.

The flower-girls ate off their knees, so as not to mess the work table. They quickly swallowed their food, for eating was a trouble to them, and they preferred to spend the hour that they were allowed for their meal in watching the passers-by out of the window, or indulging in confidential chit chat in the corners. On that day they endeavoured to discover what had become of the gentleman who had waited over the way during the morning, but he had altogether disappeared. Madame Lerat and Nana glanced at each other, but kept their mouths shut. It was already ten minutes past one, and the girls did not

seem at all in a hurry to take up their pincers again—when Leonie all at once articulated "*prrrout*," as house-painters do to call each other, in view of signalling the mistress's approach. In a moment they all seated themselves on their chairs again, with their noses bent over their work. The next moment Madame Titreville entered, and severely made the round.

From this day forth Madame Lerat regaled herself with her niece's first love adventure. She no longer left her, but went with her morning and evening, bringing her responsibility well to the front. This somewhat bothered Nana, but all the same she expanded with pride at seeing herself watched over like a treasure.

One day, however, in the Rue du Faubourg-Poissoniere, the button manufacturer ventured to put his nose between the aunt and the niece, by way of muttering words that ought not to have been said. Thereupon Madame Lerat was so terrified that she declared she no longer felt safe on her own account, and she related the whole business to her brother. Then came another rumpus. There was some pretty quarrels in the Coupeaus' rooms. To begin with, the zinc-worker gave Nana a thrashing. What was that he learnt? The monkey larked with old men. All right. Only let her be caught lolloping out of doors again, she'd be done for; he, her father, would cut off her head in a trice. Had the like ever been seen before? A chit who thought of dishonouring her family. Ther eupon he shook her, declaring in God's name that she'd have to walk straight, for he'd watch himself in future. As soon as she came home he examined her, and looked her well in the face to see if she had a little mark on the eye, one of those little kisses which steal there noiselessly. He turned her round. One evening she received another whaking on account of his having discovered a black spot on her neck. Yes, she called it a bruise—a bruise which Leonie had made in playing. He'd give her bruises indeed; he'd keep her from larking, even if he had to break her legs for her.

"Why don't you leave her alone?" Gervaise said sometimes to him, as she was more reasonable.

Ah! yes, indeed, the desire had come to her. She felt a woman and longed to be free. Then, little by little, she acquired some queer habits. One morning he noticed her rummaging in a paper bag and rubbing something on her face. It was rice powder, which she was plastering on her delicate, satin-like skin with perverse taste. He lifted the paper bag and rubbed it over her face violently enough to graze her skin, and called her a miller's daughter. Another time she brought some red ribbons home to do up her old black hat, which she was so ashamed of, and he asked her in an angry voice where she had got those ribbons. On various occasions he caught her with something pretty in her hands—a cornelian ring, a pair of cuffs with lace edges, one of those silver gilt heart-shaped lockets which girls hang between their breasts. Coupeau wanted to destroy these, but she defended her property with fury. It was hers; a lady had given it to her, or else she had obtained it from a girl at the work-room in exchange for something else. As for the locket, she had found it in the Rue d'Aboukir. When her father crushed the heart with his heel, she remained stiff and pale, with clenched hands, whilst a feeling of revolt came over her, inciting her to spring upon him and tear something off him. For a couple of years she had dreamed of having that locket, and there he had flattened it. No, she found that too strong; this must come to an end.

However, Coupeau was more worrying than judicious in the manner he sought to rule Nana with finger and eye. He was often in the wrong, and his injustice enraged the girl. She began to give up going to the work-shop, and then the zinc-worker gave her a thrashing, she declared she would not return to Titreville's again for she was always placed next to Augustine, whom she did not like. Then Coupeau took her himself to the Rue du Caire, begging the mistress of the establishment to place her always next to Augustine by way of punishment. Every

morning for a fortnight he took the trouble to come down from the Barrier Poisonniere to bring Nana to the door of the flower shop. And he stayed for five minutes on the footway to make sure that she had gone in. But one morning, while he was drinking a glass with a friend in a wine-shop in the Rue Saint Denis, he saw the minx dashing down the street. For a fortnight she had been deceiving him; instead of going into the workroom, she went up to the next storey and sat down on the stairs, waiting till he had gone off. When Coupeau began casting the blame on Madame Lerat, the latter flatly answered that she would not take it. She had told her niece all she ought to tell her to keep her on her guard, and it was not her fault if the girl still had a fancy to wander away. Now she washed her hands of the whole business; she swore she would not be mixed up in it, for she knew what she knew. Scandal and gossip in the family, oh, yes! On the other hand, Coupeau learned from the mistress that Nana was led astray by another workgirl, that little camel Leonie, who had just given up flower-making to do something very bad indeed. No doubt, the girl, merely gluttonous of pastry and gadding about in the streets, might yet have married with a wreath of orange blossom on her head. But, hang it all! one must make haste if she was to be given to a husband without a blemish, and complete like young ladies who respect themselves.

In the house in the Rue de la Goutte d'Or, they spoke of Nana's old fellow as a gentleman everyone knew. Oh! he remained very polite, even a little timid, but awfully obstinate, and patient as the devil, following her ten paces behind like an obedient poodle. Sometimes, indeed he ventured into the courtyard. One night Madame Gaudron encountered him on the second-floor landing, and he glided down alongside the balusters with his nose bent down, and looking as if on fire, but frightened. And the Lorilleux threatened to leave their house if their niece drew any more men into the house after her tails, for it

was becoming disgusting, the staircase was full of them, and one could no longer go down without meeting some fellow or another on every step, waiting. The Boches pitied the fate of this poor gentleman, a man so respectable, who was madly in love with a little monkey. But the fact was, he was a business man, they had seen his button manufactory on the Boulevard de la Villette, and he might have given a woman a position in life if he had met with an honest girl. Thanks to the details communicated by the doorkeepers, all the people of the neighbourhood, even the Lorilleux themselves, exhibited the greatest respect for the old fellow as he passed by at Nana's heels, with hanging lips, a pale face, and a framework of grey beard nicely cropped.

For the first month Nana greatly amused herself with her old lover. You should have seen him always dodging her—a perfect dip-in-the-pot who touched her skirts behind, in the crowd, without having the appearance of doing so.

Then, when she found him always behind her, she no longer thought him so funny. She became afraid of him, and would have cried out if he had approached her. Often, when she stopped in front of a jeweller's shop she heard him stammering something behind her. And what he said was true; she would have been glad to have had a cross with a velvet neckband, or a pair of coral earrings, so small, you would have thought they were drops of blood. Indeed, without being ambitious to possess jewellery, she could not remain a rag, she was tired of decking herself with the refuse from the workrooms of the Rue du Caire, and especially she had had enough of her hat, the "caloquet" on which the flowers grabbed at Titreville's hung, creating an effect like that of bells on the back of a poor man. Thus, trotting along in the mud, splashed by the vehicles, dazed by the display in the shop windows, she had longings, which twisted her chest—longings to be well dressed, yearnings to eat in the restaurants, to go to the theatre, to have an apartment

of her own with handsome furniture. She paused, pale with desire, she felt a heat mount up her whole limbs from the pavement of Paris, she was seized with a ferocious appetite to partake of the enjoyment which she elbowed in the surging crowd on the footways. And it never missed just at those very moments the old fellow whispered his suggestions into her ear. Ah! how she would have shaken hands with him in token of assent, if she had not been afraid of him, if she had not felt a sensation of revolt which strengthened her in her refusals, and made her furious and disgusted with man, and the unknown, in spite of all her wickedness.

However, when the winter arrived, life became impossible in the Coupeau household. Nana had her beating every night. When her father was tired of beating her, her mother thrashed her to teach her how to conduct herself. And very often it was a general game; as soon as one of them began to beat her, the other defended her, so that all three of them ended by rolling on the tiled floor in the midst of the broken crockery. And with all this, they were short of food, and they shivered with cold. Whenever the girl bought anything pretty, a bow of ribbon or a pair of sleeve-links, her parents confiscated the purchase and drank what they could get for it. She had nothing of her own, excepting her allowance of blows, before coiling herself up between the rags of a sheet, where she shivered under her little black skirt, which she stretched out by way of her only covering. No, that cursed life could not continue; she was not going to leave her skin in it. Her father had long since ceased to be thought of by her; when a father gets drunk as hers did, he isn't a father, but a dirty beast one longs to get rid of. And now, too, her mother was going down the hill in her respect. She drank also. She liked to go and fetch her husband at old Colombe's, so as to be stood drinks; and she willingly sat down, with none of the air of disgust that she had put on the first occasion, draining glasses indeed at one gulp, dragging her elbows over the tables

for hours, and leaving the place with her eyes starting out of her head. •

When Nana passed before the Assommoir and saw her mother inside, with her nose in her glass, fuddled in the midst of the disputing men, she was seized with rage; for youth, which has other dainty thoughts uppermost, does not understand drink. On these evenings it was a fine spectacle. Father drunk, mother drunk, a devilish home that stunk with liquor, and where there was no bread. The fact was, a saint would not have stayed in the place. So much the worse if she took French leave one of these days; her parents might say their *mea culpa*, and own that they had pushed her out of the house.

One Saturday, when Nana came home, she found her father and her mother in a lamentable condition. Coupeau, who had fallen across the bed, was snoring. Gervaise, crouching on a chair, was swinging her head, with her eyes vaguely and uneasily staring into vacancy. She had forgotten to warm the dinner, the remains of a stew. A tallow candle which she had forgotten to snuff revealed the shameful wretchedness of the room.

"It's you, caterpillar?" stammered Gervaise. "Ah well, your father will make you dance."

Nana did not reply, but remained pale, gazing at the cold stove, the table on which no plates were laid, the lugubrious chamber which this pair of drunkards invested with the pale horror of their brutality. She did not take off her hat, but walked round the room; then, with her teeth tightly set, she opened the door and went out.

"You are going down again?" asked her mother, who had not the power even to turn her head.

"Yes; I've forgotten something. I shall come up again. Good-evening."

But she did not return. The next day when the Coupeaus were sobered they fought together, throwing in each other's face the charge of being the cause of Nana's flight. Ah! she was far away if she were running still! As they tell children about sparrows, her parents might

set a pinch of salt on her tail, perhaps they would catch her. It was a great blow; and crushed Gervaise, for, in spite of the impairment of her faculties, she realised thoroughly that her daughter's misconduct lowered her still more; she was alone now, with no child to esteem her, able to let herself sink as low as she could fall. Yes, this heartless creature had borne off the last remnants of her mother's good name away in her dirty skirts. And Gervaise drank furiously for three days, with clenched fists and her mouth swollen with abominable words as to this slut of a daughter. Coupeau, after rolling round the outer Boulevards, and looking at all the bad women who went past him, as if trying to find Nana among them, took to smoking his pipe again quietly enough; only, when he was sitting at table at meal-time, he frequently sprang to his feet, raising his arms in the air with a knife in his hand, and crying out that he was dishonoured, and then he sat down again to finish his soup.

In the house, where girls flew off every month like canaries whose cages are left open, no one was surprised to hear of the Coupeaus' misfortune. But the Lorilleux were triumphant. Ah! they had predicted that the girl would give her parents pepper! It was deserved; all artificial flower-girls went wrong. The Boches and the Poissons also sneered, with an extraordinary display and expenditure of virtue. Lantier alone covertly defended Nana. Good heavens! said he, with his puritanical air, no doubt a girl who rides off in this fashion offends against every law; but, with a gleam in the corner of his eyes, he added that, hang it all! the girl was, after all, too pretty to lead such a life of misery at her age.

"Don't you know," cried Madame Lorilleux, one day in the Boches' room, where the party were taking coffee, "ah! well, as sure as day-light is shining round us, the Hobbler has sold her daughter! Yes, she sold her and I have proof of it. The old fellow who was always on the stairs morning and night, went up to pay something on account. That opens people's eyes. And, yesterday,

too ! Why, they were seen together at the Ambj Theatre. Upon my word of honour, they're together ; so you see it was so."

Whilst finishing their coffee, the gossips discussed the subject. After all, it was possible ; stranger things than that had occurred. And in the neighbourhood the most respectable folks ended by repeating that Gervaise had sold her daughter.

Gervaise nowadays shuffled along in her slippers, without troubling herself about anyone. You might have called her a thief in the street, she wouldn't have turned round. For a month past she hadn't looked at Madame Fauconnier's ; the latter had had to turn her out of the place to avoid quarrels. In a few weeks' time she had entered the service of eight washerwomen one after another ; she did two or three 'days' work in each place, and then she was dismissed, so badly did she iron the things entrusted to her, careless and dirty, and losing her head to such an extent that she quite forgot her trade. At last, realising her own incapacity, she gave up ironing, and went out washing by the day at the wash-house in the Rue Neuve, where she still moved on, floundering about in the water, fighting with filth, reduced to the roughest but easiest work, a little lower on the down-hill slope. However, the wash-house hardly beautified her. She was like a splashed dog when she came out of it, soaked, and showing her blue skin. Moreover, she grew stouter and stouter, in spite of her frequent dances before the empty sideboard, and her leg became so twisted that she could no longer walk beside anyone without the danger of knocking him over, so great was her lameness.

Naturally enough, when one falls to this point, all the pride of a woman leaves her. Gervaise had put aside all her old self-respect, coquetry, and need of sentiment, propriety, and politeness. Lantier had altogether given her up ; he no longer spoke to her even for form's sake ; and she did not appear to notice the finish of a long connection, slowly spun out, and ending in mutual

weariness, Even, Lantier's friendship with Virginie left her quite calm, so great was her indifference now for all the pleasantries that had once been her delight. Everyone was aware that the hatter and the grocer were playing a fine game. The whole district of the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or laughed at this good farce. They thought it very funny that authority should be thus disgraced. Besides, Lantier had conquered the whole corner. The shop and the shopwoman went together. He had just come from eating a washerwoman out of doors; now he was nibbling a grocer; and if he chose to turn to the dressmakers and the milliners and stationers, he had jaws wide enough to swallow them all.

No, never had a man been seen who rolled about in sugar as he did. Lantier had thought of himself when he advised Virginie to deal in dainties. He was too much of a Provincial not to adore sweet things; and, in fact, he would have lived off sugar candy, lozenges, pastilles, sugar plums, and chocolate. Sugared almonds, above all, left a little froth on his lips, so keenly did they tickle the palate. For a year he had been living only on sweetmeats. He opened the drawers and stuffed himself, whenever Virginie asked him to mind the shop. Often, when he was speaking before five or six people, he would take the lid off a jar on the counter, dip his hand into it, and begin to nibble at something sweet: the glass jar remained open, and its contents lessened. People ceased paying attention to it, it was a mania of his, so he had declared. Besides, he had invented a perpetual cold, an irritation of the throat, which he always said it was necessary to soften.

He still did no work, for he had more and more important schemes than ever in view. He was devising a superb invention—the umbrella-hat, a hat which transformed itself into a gingham on your head at the first drops of a shower; and he promised Poisson half shares in the profits of it, and even borrowed twenty franc pieces of him to defray the cost of experiments. In the

meantime the shop melted away on his tongue. All the stock in trade went after it, down to the chocolate cigars and pipes in pink caramel. Whenever he was stuffed with sweetmeats, and feeling a bit tender, he paid himself with a last kiss on the groceress in a corner, who found him all sugar, with lips which tasted like burnt almonds. A delightful man. He was positively becoming all honey. The Boches said he merely had to dip a finger into his coffee to make it an actual syrup.

Softened by the perpetual dessert, Lantier showed himself paternal towards Gervaise again. He gave her advice, and scolded her because she no longer liked work. What the devil! a woman of her age should know how to turn herself round. And he accused her of having always been a glutton. Nevertheless, as one ought to hold out a helping hand, even to folks who don't deserve it, he endeavoured to find her a little work. Thus he had prevailed upon Virginie to let Gervaise come once a week to scrub the shop and the rooms. That was the sort of thing she understood, and each time she earned her thirty sous. Gervaise came on the Saturday morning with a pail and a scrubbing brush, without appearing to suffer in the least at having to perform a dirty humble duty, a charwoman's work, in the home where she had reigned as the beautiful fair-haired mistress. It was a last humiliation, the end of her pride.

One Saturday she had a hard time of it. It had rained for three days, and the customers appeared to have brought all the mud of the neighbourhood into the shop on the soles of their boots. Virginie was at the counter, doing the grand lady, with her hair well combed, and wearing a little white collar and a pair of lace cuffs. By her side, on the narrow seat covered with red American cloth, Lantier did the swell, looking thoroughly at home, as if he were the real master of the place, and from time to time he carelessly dipped his hand into a jar of peppermint drops, just to crack something sweet according to his habit.

"I say, Madame Coupeau!" cried Virginie, who was following the scrubbing process with compressed lips, "you have left some dirt over there in that corner. Scrub that again, will you?"

Gervaise obeyed. She returned to the corner, and began to scrub again. She bent double on her knees in the midst of the dirty water, with her shoulders prominent, her arms fully stretched out, and purple with cold. Her old skirt, quite soaked, stuck to her body. And there, on the floor, she looked a filthy, ill-combed drab, the rents in her jacket showing her puffy form, her fat, flabby flesh which heaved, swayed, and jumped about under the rough shakings of her work; and she perspired so much that from her moist face big drops of sweat fell on to the floor.

"The more elbow grease one uses the more it shines," said Lantier, sententiously, his mouth full of peppermint drops.

Virginie, who sat back with the air of a princess, her eyes only half open, was still looking on at the scrubbing, and indulging in remarks. "A little more on the right there. Take care of the woodwork. You know I was not very well satisfied last Saturday. The stains remained."

And both together, the hatter and the grocer, put on a more important air, as if they had been on a throne whilst Gervaise dragged herself through the black mud at their feet. Virginie must have been enjoying herself, for a yellowish flame darted from her cat's eyes, and she looked at Lantier with a peculiar smile. At last she was revenged for that thrashing she had received at the washhouse, and which she had never forgotten.

However, when Gervaise ceased scrubbing, the slight sound of a saw came from the back room. Through the open doorway, Poisson's profile stood out against the pale light of the courtyard. He was on leave that day, and was profiting by his leisure time to indulge in his

mania for constructing little boxes. He was seated at a table, and was cutting out arabesques in a cigar box with remarkable care.

"I say, Badingue!" cried Lantier, who had given him this surname again out of friendship, "I shall keep that box of yours as a present for a young lady."

Virginie pinched the hatter, but not ceasing to smile; he repaid evil with good, gallantly.

"Quite so," said the policeman. "I was working for you, Auguste, in view of presenting you with a token of friendship."

"Ah! if that's the case, I'll keep your little box!" rejoined Lantier, laughing. "I'll hang it round my neck with a ribbon."

Then, all at once, as if this thought brought another one to his memory,—

"By the bye," he cried, "I met Nana last night."

This news caused Gervaise so much emotion that she sank down in the dirty water which covered the floor of the shop. She sat there perspiring, and quite out of breath, with her scrubbing brush in her hand.

"Ah!" she muttered.

"Yes; as I was going down the Rue des Martyrs, I caught sight of a girl who was wriggling on the arm of an old fellow in front of me, and I said to myself: I know that phiz. I quickened my pace, and sure enough found myself face to face with my blessed Nana. There's no need to pity her, she seemed very happy, with a pretty woollen dress on her back, a gold cross, and an awfully droll air about her."

"Ah!" repeated Gervaise, in a huskier voice.

Lantier, who had finished the pastilles, took some barley-sugar out of another jar.

"She's vicious, the monkey," he resumed. "Do you know, she made a sign to me to follow her, as composed as an ox. Then she left her old man somewhere in a cafe—oh, a wonderful fellow, the old chap—and she came and joined me under a doorway. A perfect serpent,

pretty, and doing the stylish. She wanted to have news of everyone—I was very pleased to meet her.”

“Ah!” said Gervaise, for the third time. She drew herself together, and still waited. Hadn’t her daughter had a single word for her then. In the silence Poisson’s saw could be heard again. Lantier, who felt gay, was sucking his barley-sugar, and smacking his lips.

“Well, if I saw her, I should go over to the other side of the street,” interposed Virginie, who had just pinched the hatter again most fiercely. “Yes, I should blush to be recognised on the public street by one of those sluts. It isn’t because you are there, Madame Coupeau, but your daughter is a bad girl. Why, Poisson runs in girls who are not a whit worse than she is, every day.”

Gervaise said nothing, nor did she budge; her eyes were fixed on vacancy. She finished by moving her head slowly to and fro, as if in reply to her thoughts, whilst the hatter, with a gluttonous air, muttered,—

“As for being bad, a fellow would willingly put up with such badness.”

But the grocer gave him such a fearful look, that he had to pause and pacify her with some delicate attention. He watched the policeman, and observing that he had his nose lowered over his little box again, he took advantage of the opportunity to shove the barley-sugar into Virginie’s mouth. Thereupon she laughed at him good naturedly, and turned all her wrath against the charwoman.

“Just make haste, eh? The work doesn’t get on whilst you remain stuck there like a street post. Come, look alive, I don’t want you to swim about in the water till the evening.”

And she added, with a hateful expression, in a lower tone, “It isn’t my fault if her daughter’s gone wrong.”

No doubt Gervaise did not hear. She had begun to scrub the floor again, with her back bent, and dragging herself along with a motion like that of a frog. With both hands tightly clutching hold of the brush, she

pushed back the black flood which splashed her with mud, up to the hair. Then after sweeping the dirty water into the gutter, all that remained was for her to rinse the floor.

However, after a pause, Lantier, who felt bored, raised his voice again. "Do you know, Badingue," he cried, "I met your master yesterday in the Rue de Rivoli. He looks devilish seedy. He hasn't six months' life left in his body. Ah! after all, with the life he leads——"

He spoke of the Emperor. The policeman did not lift his eyes, but curtly answered, "If you were the Government you wouldn't be so fat."

"Oh, my dear fellow, if I were the Government," replied the hatter, suddenly putting on an air of gravity, "things would advance rather better, I give you my word for it. Thus, their foreign policy, why, for some time past it has been sufficient to make a fellow laugh. If I—I who speak to you—only knew a journalist to inspire him with my ideas!"

He was growing animated, and as he had finished crunching his barley-sugar, he opened a drawer, from which he took a number of jujubes which he began to swallow, gesticulating,—

"It's quite simple. Before anything else, I should give Poland her independence again, and I should establish a great Scandinavian state to keep the Giant of the North at bay. Then I should construct a republic out of all the little German states. As to England, she's scarcely to be feared; if she moved ever so little, I should send a hundred thousand men to India. In addition to that, I should send the Sultan back to Mecca and the Pope to Jerusalem, smacking their backs with the butt end of a rifle. Eh? Europe would soon be clean. Come, Badingue, just look here."

He stopped to take five or six jujubes in his hand. "Why, it wouldn't take longer than to swallow these."

And he threw one jubube after the other into his open mouth.

"The Empero. has another scheme," said the policeman, after thinking about it for a couple of minutes.

"Oh, leave me alone!" replied the hatter. "We know what his scheme is! Europe doesn't care a damn for us. Every day the Tuileries footmen pick your master up under the table between a couple of high life courtesans."

But Poisson had risen to his feet. He advanced and placed his hand on his heart, saying,—“You hurt me, Auguste. Argue if you will, but don't indulge in personalities.”

Thereupon Virginie intervened, bidding them stop their quarrel. She didn't care a button for Europe. How could two men, who shared everything else, always be discussing about politics? For a minute they mumbled some indistinct words. Then the policeman, by way of showing that he harboured no spite, brought forward the cover of his little box which he had just finished; it bore the inscription in marquetry: “To Auguste, a token of friendship.” Lantier, feeling very much flattered, lounged back and spread himself out so that he almost sat upon Virginie. And the husband looked upon the scene, with his face the colour of an old wall, and his bleared eyes quite expressionless; but all the same at moments the red hairs of his moustaches stood up on end of their own accord in a very remarkable fashion, that would have alarmed any man who was less certain of his affair than the hatter.

This brute of a Lantier had that quiet cheek which pleases some ladies. As Poisson turned his back he was seized with the idea of printing a kiss on Madame Poisson's left eye. As a rule he was slyly prudent, but when he had been disputing about politics he risked everything, so as to show the wife his superiority. These gloating caresses, cheekily stolen behind the policeman's back, gave him his revenge on the Empire which had turned France into a house of ill-fame. Only on this occasion he had forgotten Gervaise's presence. She had

just finished rinsing and wiping the shop, and she was standing near the counter waiting for her thirty sous. However, the kiss on Virginie's eye left her perfectly placid, as being quite natural, and as part of an affair she had no right to mix herself up in. Virginie seemed rather annoyed. She threw the thirty sous on to the counter in front of Gervaise. The latter did not budge, but stood there waiting, still palpitating with the effort she had made in scrubbing, and looking as soaked and as ugly as a dog fished out of a sewer.

"Then she didn't tell you anything?" she asked the latter at last.

"Who?" he cried. "Ah, yes, you mean Nana. No, nothing else. What a mouth she has, the little monkey!"

• And Gervaise went off with her thirty sous in her hand. The holes in her shoes spat water forth like pumps, they were real musical shoes, and played a tune as they left moist traces of their broad soles along the pavement.

In the district, the feminine drinkers of her own class now declared she drank to console herself for her daughter's misconduct. She herself, when she gulped down her dram of spirits on the counter, put on a dramatic air and tossed the liquor into her mouth, wishing it would "do" for her. And on the days when she came home screwed, she stammered that it was all through grief. But honest folk shrugged their shoulders; they understood what that meant: ascribing the effects of the peppery fire of the Assommoir to grief, indeed; at all events, she ought to have called it bottle grief. No doubt, at the beginning, she couldn't digest Nana's flight. all the honourable feelings remaining in her revolted at the thought; and besides, as a rule, a mother doesn't like to have to think that her daughter, at that very instant, it may be, is being over familiarly addressed by the first chance comer. But Gervaise was already too stupefied, with a sick head and a crushed heart, to think of the

disgrace for long. With her it came and went. She remained sometimes for a week together without thinking of her daughter ; and then suddenly a tender or an angry feeling seized hold of her, sometimes when she had had no food, at others when she had fed well, a furious desire to catch Nana in some corner, where she would perhaps have kissed her, or perhaps have beaten her, according to her fancy of the moment. She finished by having a very confused idea of what was right and what was wrong.

The latter was never weary of talking about the demolition of Paris. He accused the Emperor of setting palaces everywhere, so as to drive the working classes into the provinces ; and the policeman, white with concentrated anger, answered that, on the contrary, the Emperor thought of the working classes before aught else, and that he would raze Paris to the ground if need be, solely with the object of procuring employment for them.

Gervaise was also extremely annoyed by these embellishments, which disturbed the dark corner of the faubourg she was used to. Her annoyance came from the fact that the district was being embellished just as she was going downhill to ruin. When a person is in the gutter, he doesn't care to have a sunray dart upon his head ; and so, on the days when Gervaise was seeking for Nana, she preferred to stride over the building materials, flounder about on the unfinished footways, and knock against the palings. The fine house on the Boulevard Ornano was rather too much for her patience. Such houses as that were only for hussies like Nana.

However, she had several times heard news of the girl. Ready tongues are always found anxious to pay you a poor compliment. Yes, she had been told that the monkey had turned up her old protector, just like the inexperienced girl she was. She had got on capitally with this old chap, petted, adored, and free too, if she had only known how to set about it. But youth is foolish, and she had no doubt gone off with some lad,

no one knew exactly where. What seemed sure was that one afternoon she had left her old protector on the Place de la Bastille, only for half a minute, and the old fellow was still waiting for her. Other persons swore they had seen her since kicking up her heels at the "Grand Hall of Folly," in the Rue de la Chapelle. It was at this time that Gervaise took it into her head to frequent all the dancing-places of the neighbourhood. She did not pass before a public ball-room without going in. Coupeau went with her. At first they merely made the round of the room, looking at the people who were jumping about. But one evening, as they had some cash, they sat down and ordered a large bowl of hot wine, in view of regaling themselves and waiting to see if Nana would appear. At the end of a month or so, they had forgotten her, but they frequented the balls for their own amusement, liking to look at the dancers. They would stay for hours without exchanging a word, resting their elbows on the table, stultified amidst the quaking of the floor, and yet no doubt amusing themselves as they stared with pale eyes at the Barriere "inconsequents," in the stifling atmosphere and ruddy glow of the hall.

One November evening it happened that they went into the "Grand Hall of Folly" to warm themselves. Out of doors a sharp wind cut one across the face. But the hall was quite full. There was a very large swarm inside; people at all the tables, people in the middle, people up above, any amount of meat. Yes, those who cared for tripe could enjoy themselves. When they had gone round the room twice without finding a vacant table, they resolved to remain standing and wait till somebody went off. Coupeau was wagging on his legs, in a dirty blouse, with an old cloth cap which had lost its peak flattened down on his head. And as he stopped up the way, he saw a scraggy young fellow who was wiping his coat-sleeve, after elbowing him.

"I say!" cried Coupeau in a rage, as he took his

pipe out of his black mouth, "can't you apologise? And you play the elevated, eh? because a fellow wears a blouse! I'll show you; you scraggy young scamp, that the blouse is the finest garment out; yes! the garment for work. I'll wipe you if you like with my fists. Did one ever hear of such a thing—a ne'er-do-well insulting a workman!"

Gervaise tried to pacify him, but in vain. He drew himself up in his rags, in full view, and struck his blouse, crying out,—

"There's a man's chest under that!"

Thereupon the young man dived into the crowd, muttering,—

"What a dirty blackguard!"

Coupeau wanted to follow and get hold of him. He wasn't going to let himself be insulted by a fellow with a coat on. That one probably wasn't even paid for! Some second-hand toggery to impose upon a girl with, without having to lay out a centime. If he caught the fellow again, he'd bring him down on his knees and make him bend before the blouse. But the crush was too great; one could not get walking. He and Gervaise turned slowly round the dancers; there were three rows of sightseers packed close together, whose faces lighted up whenever a man sprawled or a woman threw her legs up in the air; and as Coupeau and Gervaise were both of short stature, they raised themselves on tiptoe, trying to see something at all events—the chignons and hats that were bobbing about. The cracked brass instruments of the orchestra were furiously rendering a quadrille, a perfect tempest which caused the hall to shake; while the dancers, striking the floor with their feet, raised a cloud of dust which dimmed the brightness of the gas. The heat was insufferable.

"Look there," said Gervaise, all at once.

"Look at what?"

"Why, at that velvet hat over there."

They raised themselves up on tiptoe. On the left hand

there was an old black velvet hat trimmed with ragged feathers bobbing about—regular hearse's plumes. It was dancing a devil of a dance, this hat—curvetting and whirling round, diving down and then dashing up again. Coupeau and Gervaise lost sight of it as the people round about moved their heads, but then suddenly they saw it again, swaying farther off with such droll effrontery that people laughed merely at the sight of this dancing hat, without knowing what was underneath it.

"Well?" inquired Coupeau.

"Don't you recognise that chignon?" muttered Gervaise, in a stifled voice. "May my head be cut off if it isn't her."

With one push the zinc-worker made his way through the crowd. By the name of heaven, yes, it was Nana! And a nice figure she was too! She had nothing on her back but an old silk dress, all stained and sticky from having wiped the tables of pubs, and with its flounces so torn that they fell in tatters round about. There was not even a bit of a shawl over her shoulders; no, she openly showed her bare bodice with its torn buttonholes.

"Wait a bit; I'll make her dance!" Coupeau went on.

Naturally enough, Nana was not on her guard. It was a sight to see how she wriggled herself about! She twisted to the right and to the left, bending double as if she were going to break herself in two, and darting her feet into her partner's face as though she meant to split herself! There was a crowd round her; she was cheered, and she caught up her skirts, and, quivering with the movement of the dance, spun round and round like a whipping-top, eventually falling on to the floor; then she indulged in a modest little dance, which gained more applause, her hips undulating in wonderful style.

It made you actually long to carry her off into a corner and cover her with kisses.

However, as Coupeau fell into the midst of the pastourelle he disarranged the figure, and was cuffed by the bystanders.

"I tell you it's my daughter!" he cried; "let me pass."

Nana was just going backwards, sweeping the floor with her flounces, rounding her figure, and wriggling it, so as to look all the nicer. She received a masterly cuff, raised herself up, and turned quite pale on recognising her father and mother. Bad luck this was, and no mistake.

"Turn him out!" the dancers yelled out. "

But Coupeau, who had just recognised his daughter's partner as the scraggy young man in the coat, did not care a button for what people said.

"Yes, it's ourselves," he howled. "Eh? you didn't look for this. So we got hold of you here, and with a fellow like that too, who insulted me a little while ago!"

Gervaise, whose teeth were tight set, pushed him aside, exclaiming,—

"Shut up. There's no need of so much explanation."

And, stepping forward, she dealt Nana a couple of cuffs. The first knocked the feathered hat on one side, and the second left a red mark on the girl's white cheek. Nana was too stupefied either to cry out or resist. The orchestra went on playing, the crowd grew angry, and repeated ferociously, "Turn them out! Turn them out!"

"Come, make haste!" Gervaise went on. "Just walk in front, and don't try to run off. You shall sleep in prison if you do."

The scraggy young man had prudently gone off. Nana walked ahead, very stiff and still stupefied by her bad luck. Whenever she displayed the least unwillingness, a cuff from behind brought her back to the direction of the door. And thus they went out, all three of them, amid the jeers and banter of the spectators, whilst the orchestra finished playing the pastourelle with such thunder that the trombones appeared to be firing bullets.

The old life began once more. After sleeping for twelve hours in her closet, Nana behaved very well for a week or so. She had invented for herself a modest little

dress, and wore a cap with the strings tied under her chin. Seized, indeed, with remarkable fervour, she declared she would do work at home, where one could earn what one liked without hearing any nasty workroom talk; and she secured some work and installed herself at a table, getting up at five o'clock in the morning on the first few days to roll her violet stems. But when she had delivered a few gross, she stretched her arms and yawned over her work, with her hands quite cramped, for she had lost her knack of stem-rolling, and was quite stifled, shut up like this at home after permitting herself so much open-air freedom during the last six months. Then the glue dried, the petals and the green paper got stained with grease, and the flower-dealer came three times in person to make a row and claim his spoiled materials.

Nana went on, constantly getting a thrashing from her father, and arguing with her mother, morning and night—quarrels in which the two women behaved like brutes. It couldn't endure, this life; the twelfth day she took herself off, with no more luggage than her modest dress on her back and her cap on her ears. The Lorilleux, who had pursed their lips on hearing of her return and repentance, nearly died of laughter now. Second performance; eclipse number two; young ladies for the reformatory take the train! No, it was really too comical. Nana went off in such an amusing style. Well, if the Coupeaus wished to keep her in future they must shut her up in a cage.

In presence of other people the Coupeaus declared they were very glad to be rid of the girl, though in reality they were fearfully angry. However, rage can't last for ever, and soon they heard without even blinking that Nana was often seen in the neighbourhood. Gervaise, who accused her of doing it to disgrace them, set herself above scandal; she might meet the hussy in the street, she said; she wouldn't even dirty her hand to cuff her; yes, it was all over.

Nana, meanwhile, was making the dancing halls of the

neighbourhood lively. She was known from the "Ball of Queen Blanche" to the "Grand Hall of Folly." When she entered the "Elysée-Montmartre" people climbed on to the tables to see her do the "sniffing crawfish," during the figure of the pastourelle. As she had twice been turned out of the "Chateau Rouge" ball, she walked outside the door waiting for someone she knew to escort her inside. The "Black Ball" on the outer Boulevard, and the "Grand Turk" in the Rue des Poissonniers, were respectable places where she only went when she had clean petticoats on. Of all the leaping places of the neighbourhood, however, those she most enjoyed were the "Hermitage Ball" in the damp courtyard, and "Robert's Ball" in the Impasse du Cadran, two wretched little halls, lighted up with half-a-dozen oil lamps, and kept paternally, everyone pleased and everyone free, so much so that the men and their girls kissed each other at their ease, in the corners, without being annoyed by anyone. And meanwhile Nana had ups and downs, perfect transformations, now tricked out like a stylish woman, and now all dirt like a slut. Ah! she had a fine life.

On several occasions the Coupeaus imagined they saw their daughter in some dirty drinking den. They turned their backs and went off in another direction so as not to be obliged to recognise her. They didn't care to be laughed at by an entire dancing hall again for the sake of leading such a drab home. One night as they were going to bed, however, someone knocked at the door. It was Nana, who quietly came to beg a bed; and in what a condition, good heavens! her head bare, her dress in tatters, and her boots full of holes—such a toilet as might have led the police to run her in, and take off to the Depot. Naturally enough she received a thrashing, and then she gluttonously fell on a morsel of stale bread and went to sleep, tired out, with the last mouthful between her teeth. Then this sort of life went on. When the girl felt a little improved, she went off again one fine morning. Neither seen nor known. The bird had flown. And weeks and

months passed by, and she seemed lost, when all at once up she turned again, without even saying where she came from, sometimes in such a dirty state one wouldn't have taken hold of her with a pair of tongs, and scratched from head to foot, at others, well dressed, but so weakened by a wild life that she could not stand on her legs. Her parents had to accustom themselves to it. Smackings did no good. They stamped on her, but it didn't prevent her from looking on home as a hotel, where she could lodge by the week. She knew she should pay for her lodgings with a thrashing, so she considered and came to receive it, if she thought it likely to be profitable. Besides, one grows tired of whacking, and the Coupeaus ended by letting Nana do as she liked. She came home or stayed away; providing she didn't leave the door open, that sufficed. Good Lord! habit wears out self-respect just as it wears out everything else.

There was only one thing that really annoyed Gervaise. This was to see her daughter come home in a dress with a train and a hat covered with feathers. No, she couldn't stand this show-off. Nana might run riot if she chose, but when she came home to her mother's she ought, at least, to dress like a workgirl. The dresses with trains caused quite a revolution in the house; the Lorilleux scoffed; Lantier, whose mouth watered, turned the girl round to look at her; the Boches had forbidden Pauline to associate with this rascal in her frippery. And Gervaise was also enraged by Nana's exhausted slumber, when, after one of her fugues, she slept till noon, with her chignon undone and still full of hairpins, looking so white and breathing so feebly that she appeared to be dead. Her mother shook her five or six times in the course of the morning, threatening to throw a jugful of water over her. The sight of this handsome, lazy girl, exasperated her, as she lay thus, sleeping off the debauchery with which her flesh seemed puffed out, and unable even to wake up. Nana opened an eye, closed it again, and then stretched herself out all the more.

One day, after reproaching her with her vicious life, Gervaise put her threat into execution by shaking her dripping hand over Nana's body. Quite infuriated, the girl rolled herself up in the sheet, and cried out,—

"That's enough, mamma. It would be better not to talk about men. You did whatever you liked, and now I do what I like."

"What! what!" stammered the mother.

"Yes, I never said anything to you about it, for it didn't concern me; but you didn't trouble yourself at all; I have often seen you walking downstairs when papa was snoring. That doesn't amuse you now. So just give me peace; you shouldn't have set me the example."

Gervaise remained pale, with trembling hands, turning round without knowing what she was about, whilst Nana, flattened on her breast, embraced her pillow with both arms, and fell again into the torpor of her leaden slumber.

Coupeau growled, no longer sane enough to think of striking out. He was altogether losing his head. And really there was no occasion to call him an unprincipled father, for liquor deprived him of all consciousness of good and evil.

Now it was a regular thing. He wasn't sober once in six months; then he was taken ill, and had to go into the Sainte-Anne hospital—a pleasure trip for him. The Lorilleux said that the Duke of Bowel-Twister had gone to visit his estates. At the end of a few weeks he left the asylum, repaired and nailed up again, and then he began to pull himself to bits once more, till he was down on his back and needed another mending. In three years he went seven times to Sainte-Anne in this fashion. The neighbourhood said that his cell was kept prepared for him. Naturally, this obstinate toper demolished himself more and more each time, so that, from relapse to relapse, one could foresee the final smash, the last cracking of this shady cask, all the hopes of which were breaking off one by one.

And he did not improve in appearance; a perfect ghost to look at! The poison was having fearful effects. By dint of imbibing alcohol, his body shrunk up like a *fœtus* displayed in glass jars in chemical laboratories. When he came near a window one could see through his ribs, so skinny had he become. With sunken cheeks and dripping eyes, he only kept his truffle nose pretty red and flowery, like a pink, in the middle of his ravaged face. Those who knew his age, only forty years just gone, felt a little shudder when he passed by, bent and unsteady, looking as old as the streets. And the trembling of his hands redoubled, the right one danced to such an extent that most days he had to take his glass between both fists to carry it to his lips. Oh, that cursed shaking! it was the only thing that worried him in the midst of his lethargy. One could hear him growling ferocious insults against those hands of his. At other times you could see him gazing at them for hours, watching them dance like frogs, without saying a word, no longer angry, but looking rather as if he were trying to think what internal mechanism could possibly make them play games like that; and one evening Gervaise had found him like this, with two big tears dripping down his drunkard's scorched cheeks.

The last summer, during which Nana came home to spend such of her nights as remained, was especially bad for Coupeau. His voice changed completely, as if liquor had set a new music in his throat. He became deaf of one ear. Then in a few days his sight grew dim, and he had to clutch hold of the balusters to keep himself from falling. As for his health, he had horrible headaches and dizziness. All of a sudden he was seized with acute pains in his arms and legs; he turned pale, was forced to sit down, and remained on a chair stupefied for hours; indeed, after one such attack, his arm remained paralysed for the whole day. He took to his bed several times; he rolled himself up and hid himself under the sheet, breathing hard and constantly, like a suffering animal. Then the strange

scenes of Sainte-Anne commenced again. Suspicious and nervous, worried with a burning fever, he rolled about in a mad rage, tearing his blouse and biting the furniture with his convulsed jaws; or else he sank into a great state of emotion, complaining like a child, sobbing and grieving because nobody loved him. One evening, when Gervaise and Nana returned home together, they did not find him in his bed. He had laid the bolster in his place. And when they discovered him concealing himself between the bed and the wall, his teeth were chattering, and he related that some men had come to murder him. The two women were obliged to put him to bed again and quiet him like a child.

Coupeau only knew one cure—to suck a pint of spirits inside him, a fillip in his stomach which set him upright again. This was how he doctored his gripes in the mornings. His memory had left him long ago; his brain was a void; and he no sooner found himself on his feet than he made fun at illness. He had never been ill. Yes, he had got to the point when a fellow croaks, declaring that he's quite well. And his wits were leaving him in other respects too. When Nana came home after knocking about for six weeks or so, he seemed to imagine she had returned from doing some errand in the neighbourhood. Often when she was hanging on an acquaintance's arm she met him and laughed at him without his recognising her. Indeed, he no longer counted for anything; she might have sat down on him if she couldn't have found a chair.

When the first frosts came, Nana went off once more, under the pretence of going to the fruiterer's to see if there were any baked pears. She scented winter, and didn't exactly wish to let her teeth chatter in front of the fireless stove. The Coupeaus simply called her a vagabond because they had waited for the pears. No doubt she would return again. The other winter she had stayed away three weeks to fetch her father a penn'orth of tobacco. But the months went on, and the girl did not

show up. This time she must have indulged in a furious gallop. When June arrived, she did not even turn up with the sunshine. Evidently it was all over, she had found new bread somewhere or other. One day, when the Coupeaus were hard up, they sold the girl's iron bedstead for six francs down, which they drank together at Saint-Ouen. The bedstead had been in their way.

One morning in July, Virginie called to Gervaise, who was passing by, and begged her to lend a hand to wash up, for Lantier had entertained a couple of friends the day before. And while Gervaise was cleaning up the plates and dishes, greasy with the traces of the entertainment, the hatter, who was still feeding himself in the shop suddenly called out,—

“I say, mother, do you know I saw Nana the other day.”

Virginie, who was seated at the counter, looking very wearied out in front of the jars and drawers, which were fast being emptied, tossed her head furiously. She kept herself from saying anything, but really this was going it too strong. Lantier met Nana too often. Oh! she was by no means ready to put her hand in the fire to vouch for his honour; he was a man to do even worse things than that when a petticoat fancy came into his head. Madame Lerat, very intimate just then with Virginie, who gave her her confidences, had that moment entered the shop, and hearing Lantier's remark, she made a suggestive grimace, and asked,—

“In what sense did you see her?”

“Oh, in quite a proper sense,” answered the hatter, feeling highly flattered, and beginning to laugh and twirl his moustaches. “She was in a carriage; and I was moving quietly along on the pavement. Really it was so—I swear it.”

His eyes had lit up, and he turned towards Gervaise, who was standing in the rear of the shop wiping a dish.

“Yes, she was in a carriage, and she wore such a stylish dress! I didn't recognise her, she looked so

much like a lady of rank, with her white teeth showing, and she looked as fresh as a flower. She kissed her glove to me. She has raised a viscount I believe. Oh, she's thoroughly launched! She can afford to do without any of us; she's head over heels in happiness, the little beggar! What a love of a little kitten! no, you've no idea what a little kitten she is."

Gervaise was still wiping her plate, although it had long since been clean and shiny. Virginie was reflecting, anxious about a couple of bills which fell due the next day, and which she didn't know how to pay; whilst Lantier, stout and fat, perspiring with sugar he fed on, ventured his enthusiasm about these well-dressed little wretches in the centre of the shop, which was already three parts eaten up, and had about it the smell of ruin. Yes, there were only a few more burnt almonds to nibble, a little more barley sugar to suck, to clean the Poissons' business out. All at once on the pavement over the way, Lantier perceived the policeman, who was on duty, pass by, buttoned up, with his sword dangling by his side. And this made him all the gayer. He insisted on Virginie looking at her husband.

"Bless me," he muttered, "Badingue carries a fine head this morning! Be careful; see how stiff he walks. He must have stuck a glass eye in his back so as to catch his criminals unawares."

When Gervaise went upstairs at home, she found Coupeau seated on the bed, in the torpid state brought about by one of his attacks. He was looking at the window-panes with his dim, expressionless eyes. She sat down on a chair, quite fatigued, her hands hanging beside her dirty skirts, and for a quarter of an hour she remained in front of him without saying a word.

"I've had some news," she murmured at last. "Your daughter's been seen. Yes, your daughter's precious stylish, and hasn't any more need of you. She's awfully happy, and no mistake! Ah, good God! I'd give a great deal to be in her place."

Coupeau was still staring at the window-pane. Then suddenly he raised his ravaged face, and stammered with an idiotic laugh,—

“Come, my duck, I don’t detain you. You’re not as yet so bad looking when you’ve had a wash. As folks say, however old a pot may be, it ends by finding its lid.”

CHAPTER XII

It must have been the Saturday after the term day, something like the 12th or 13th January—Gervaise didn't quite know. She was losing her head, for it was centuries since she had had anything warm in her inside. Ah, what an infernal week! A complete clearing out. Two four-pound loaves on Tuesday, which had lasted till the Thursday; then a dry crust, discovered the night before, and finally not a crumb for thirty-six hours, a real dance this time in front of the cupboard. What she did know, by the way, what she felt on her back, was the frightful cold, a black cold, a sky as grimy as the frying-pan, thick with snow which obstinately declined to fall. When winter and hunger are both together in your interior, you may tighten your belt as much as you like, it never feeds you.

Perhaps Coupeau would bring back some money in the evening. He said that he was working. Everything is sometimes possible. And Gervaise, although she had been caught many and many a time, had ended by reckoning on this money. After all sorts of vexations, she herself couldn't get as much as a duster to wash in the whole neighbourhood; and even an old lady, whose rooms she did, had just given her the sack, charging her with swilling her liqueurs. No one would engage her; it was too hot for her everywhere; and this secretly suited her, for she had fallen to that state of indifference, when she preferred to croak rather than move her fingers. At all events, if Coupeau brought his pay home they would

have something warm to eat. And meanwhile, as it wasn't yet noon, she remained lying down on the mattress; one doesn't feel so cold or so hungry when one is lying down.

Gervaise called it a mattress; but, to tell the truth, it was only a heap of straw in the corner. By degrees the sleeping accommodation had found its way to the second-hand furniture dealer's in the district. First of all, on days when they were hard up, she had unsewn the mattress, and taken out handfuls of wool, which she concealed in her apron, and sold for ten sous a pound in the Rue Belhomme. Then when the mattress was emptied, she had obtained thirty sous for the ticking, so as to treat herself to some coffee one morning. The pills had followed, and then the bolster. There remained the wooden framework of the bed, which she couldn't put under her arm on account of the Boches, who would have called everyone in the house to the spot if they had seen the landlord's guarantee going off.

And yet, one evening, with Coupeau's help, she watched the Boches, who were feeding, and quietly carried off the bedstead, bit by bit, the sides, the back, and the framework at the bottom. With the ten francs they thus procured, they fed for three days. Was the straw mattress not enough? Even its ticking had gone after that of the woollen one, and so thus they had finished eating up their sleeping accommodation, allowing themselves an indigestion of dry bread after a twenty four hours' starve. The straw was swept aside with a broom, the dust was always turned over, and it wasn't dirtier than anything else.

Gervaise bent herself like a gun-trigger on the heap of straw, with her clothes on, and her feet drawn up under her rag of a skirt, so as to keep them warm. And huddled up, with her eyes wide open, she turned some very painful ideas over in her mind that morning. Ah, no, hang it all, she couldn't continue to live without food. She no longer felt her hunger, only she had a weight on her chest, and her brain seemed empty. Certainly there

was nothing gay to look at in the four corners of the hovel. A perfect kennel now, where greyhounds, who wear wrappers in the streets would not even have lived in effigy. Her pale eyes stared at the bare walls. Everything had long ago gone to "uncle's." All that remained were the chest of drawers, the table, and a chair. Even the marble top of the chest of drawers, and the drawers themselves had evaporated the same way as the bedstead. A fire could not have cleaned them out more completely; the small nick-nacks had melted, beginning with the time keeper, a twelve franc watch, down to the family photos, the frames of which had been bought by a woman who kept a second-hand shop—a very obliging woman, by the way, to whom Gervaise carried a sauce-pan, an iron, a comb, and who gave her five, three, or two sous in exchange, according to the article; enough, at all events, to go upstairs again with a bit of bread. But now there only remained a broken pair of snuffers, which the woman refused to give her even a sou for.

Oh! if she could only have sold the rubbish and refuse, the dust and the dirt, how quickly she would have opened shop, for the room was beastly to behold! She only saw cobwebs in the corners, and although cobwebs are perhaps good for cuts, there are, so far, no merchants who purchase them. Then, twisting her head, giving up the idea of doing a bit of trade, Gervaise gathered herself together more closely on her straw, preferring to stare through the window at the snow-laden sky, at the dreary day-light, which froze the marrow in her bones.

What a lot of worry! Though, after all, what was the use of putting herself in such a condition, and puzzling her brains! If she had only been able to have a nap. But her hole of a home wouldn't go out of her mind. M. Marescot, the landlord, had come himself the day before to tell them that he should turn them out into the street if the two quarters' rent now overdue were not paid during the following week. Well, so he might, they certainly couldn't be worse off on the pavement. Fancy this ape,

in his overcoat and his woollen gloves, coming upstairs to talk to them about rent, as if they had a treasure concealed somewhere! By Jove, instead of tightening her throat, she would have commenced by shoving something into her stomach! Really, now, she found this glutton altogether too provoking, and she wished him you know where, and deeper still.

Just the same with that beast of a Coupeau, who couldn't come home now without beating her; she wished him in the same place as the landlord. She sent them all there, wishing to rid herself of everybody, and of life too. She was becoming a real storehouse for blows. Coupeau had a cudgel, which he called his ass's fan, and he fanned his missus. You should have seen him give her abominable sweatings, which made her perspire all over. She was no better herself, for she bit and scratched him. Then they stamped about in the empty room, and gave each other such whackings as was likely to ease them of all taste for bread for good. But Gervaise ended by not caring a button for these thumps, not more than she did for anything else. Coupeau might celebrate Saint Monday for weeks together, go off on the spree for months at a time, come home mad with liquor, and seek to sharpen her, as he said; she had grown used to it, she thought him annoying, but nothing more. It was on these occasions that she wished him somewhere else. Yes, somewhere below, her brute of a man, and the Lorilleux, the Boches, and the Poissons too; in fact, the whole district, which she had such contempt for. She sent all Paris there, with a gesture of supreme carelessness, yet pleased to be able to revenge herself in this style.

Unfortunately, although people may accustom themselves to a good many things, no one has yet got the habit of doing without food. And it was this that irritated Gervaise. She didn't care a button whether she were the lowest of the low, fairly in the gutter: it was all the same to her if folks wiped themselves when she passed

near them: Bad manners no longer worried her, but hunger was always griping her. Oh! she had bidden tit-bits good-bye, she had fallen to devouring whatever she could get. On great days now, she bought parings and scraps of meat at the butchers, at the rate of four sous a pound, meat which was tired of lying about, and growing black on a plate, and she cooked this in a saucepan with a mess of potatoes. Or else she fried a buflock's heart, a dish that made her lick her lips

On other occasions, when she had some wine, she treated herself to a sop, a true parrot's soup. Two sou's worth of Italian cheese, bushels of white apples, quarts of dry beans, cooked in their own juice, these also were dainties she was not often able to treat herself to now. She came down to *arlequins* in miserable eating-houses, where, for a sou, she had a quantity of fish-bones, mixed with the parings of mouldy roast meat. She fell even lower; she begged a charitable eating-house keeper to give her his customers' dry crusts, and she made herself a bread sop, letting the crusts simmer as long as she could on a neighbour's fire. On the days on which there was nothing to hope, she searched about with the dogs, to see what might be lying outside the tradespeoples' doors before the dustmen went by; and thus, at times, she came across rich men's food, rotten melons, stinking mackerel, and chops, which she carefully inspected for fear of maggots.

Yes, she had come to this. The idea may be a repugnant one to delicate-minded folks, but if they hadn't chewed anything for three days consecutively, we could hardly see them quarrelling with their stomachs; they would go down on all fours and eat dirt like other people. Ah! the death of the poor, the empty, craving, howling hunger, the animal appetite, that leads one with chattering teeth to fill one's stomach with filthy refuse in this great Paris, so shining and golden! And to remember that Gervaise had stuffed herself with fat goose! One day, when Coupeau bagged two bread tickets from her that he

might go and sell them and get more liquor, she nearly killed him with the blow of a shovel, so hungered and enraged was she by this theft of a bit of bread.

However, after gazing for a long time at the pale sky, she had fallen into a painful dose. She dreamt that the snow loading the sky was falling on her, so cruelly did the cold pinch. All at once, she sprang to her feet, awakened with a start by a great shudder of anguish. Good God! was she going to die? Shivering and haggard, she perceived that it was still daylight. Would the night never come? How long the time appears when the stomach is empty! Hers was waking up in its turn, and commencing to torture her. Sinking on to the chair, with her head bent and her hands between her legs to warm them, she began to consider what they would have for dinner, as soon as Coupeau brought the money home: a loaf, a quart of wine, and two platefuls of tripe in the Lyonnese style. Three o'clock struck by old Bazouge's clock. Yes, it was only three o'clock. Then she began to weep. She would never have strength enough to wait till seven. Her body swung backwards and forwards, she swayed like a child nursing some sharp pain, bending herself double and crushing her stomach, so as not to feel it. Ah! one could go through an accouchment rather than hunger! And, unable to relieve herself, seized with rage, she rose and stamped about, hoping to send her hunger to sleep, by walking it to and fro like a baby. For half an hour or so she knocked against the four corners of the empty room. Then, suddenly, she paused with a fixed stare. So much the worse! They might say what they liked; she would lick their feet if they demanded it, but she would go and ask the Lorilleux to lend her ten sous.

At winter time, up these stairs of the house, the paupers' stairs, there was a constant borrowing of ten sous and twenty sous, trifling services which these hungry beggars rendered each other. Only they would rather have died than have applied to the Lorilleux, for they knew

that they were too close-handed. Thus Gervaise showed remarkable courage in going to knock at their door. She felt so frightened in the passage, that she experienced the sudden relief of people who ring a dentist's bell.

"Come in!" cried the chain-maker, in a sharp voice.

How warm and nice it was inside. The forge was blazing, its white flame lighting up the narrow workroom, whilst Madame Lorilleux placed a coil of gold wire in it to heat. Lorilleux, in front of his work-table, was perspiring with the warmth as he soldered the links of a chain together. And it smelt nice; some cabbage soup was simmering on the stove, exhaling a steam which turned Gervaise's heart topsy-turvy, and made her feel quite faint.

"Ah! it's you," growled Madame Lorilleux, without even asking her to sit down. "What is it you want?"

Gervaise did not reply. She was not on such very bad terms with the Lorilleux that week. But the demand for the ten sous stuck in her throat at sight of Boche seated at his ease near the stove, talking gossip. He looked as if he didn't care a curse for anyone, the animal! He laughed like a fool, with his mouth curved and his cheeks so puffed out that they hid his nose.

"What is it you want?" repeated Lorilleux.

"You haven't seen Coupeau?" Gervaise ended by stammering at last. "I thought he was here."

The chain-makers and the doorkeeper sneered. No, certainly not; they hadn't seen Coupeau. They didn't stand him enough glasses to see Coupeau like that. Gervaise made an effort and went on, stuttering,—

"It's because he promised to come home. Yes, he's to bring me some money. And as I have absolutely need of something—"

Silence succeeded. Madame Lorilleux was roughly fanning the fire of the stove; Lorilleux had lowered his nose over the piece of chain between his fingers, while Boche went on laughing, puffing out his face till it looked like the full moon—the opening of his mouth so round that one felt a desire to stuff one's finger in it!

"If I only had ten sous," muttered Gervaise, in a low voice.

The silence was unbroken.

"Couldn't you lend me ten sous? Oh! I would return them to you this evening!"

Madame Lorilleux turned round and stared at her. Here was a wheedler attempting to get round them. To-day she asked them for ten sous, to-morrow it would be for twenty, and there was no reason why she should stop. No, indeed; it would be warm if they lent her anything

"But, my dear," exclaimed Madame Lorilleux, "you know perfectly well that we haven't got any money! Look! there's the lining of my pocket. You can search us. If we could do it, it would be done with a willing heart, of course"

"The heart's always there," growled Lorilleux. "Only when one can't do it, one can't."

Gervaise looked very humble, and nodded her head approvingly. However, she did not go off. She looked askance at the gold, at the gold tied together hanging on the walls, at the gold wire the wife was drawing out with all the force of her little arms, at the gold links lying in a heap under the husband's knotty fingers. And she reflected that the least bit of this ugly black metal would be enough to buy her a good dinner. The workroom was as dirty as ever, full of old iron, coal dust, and sticky oil stains half rubbed off; but now, as Gervaise saw it, it seemed resplendent with treasure, like a money-changer's shop. And so she ventured to say again softly,—

"I would return them to you, return them without fail. Ten sous wouldn't put you about."

Her heart was swelling, for she did not wish to own that she had had nothing to eat since the day before. Then she felt her legs bending under her; she was frightened that she might burst into tears, and she still stammered,—

"It would be so kind of you! You cannot know.

Yes, I'm 'as far down as that, good Lord—reduced to eat!”

Thereupon the Lorilleux pursed their lips, and exchanged covert glances. So the Hobbler was begging now! Well, the fall was perfect. But they did not care for that kind of thing by any means! If they had known, they would have barricaded the door, for people should always be on their guard against beggars, people who make their way into rooms under a pretext, and carry precious objects away with them, and especiatly so in this case, as there was something worth while stealing. One might lay one's fingers no matter where, and carry off thirty or forty francs by only closing the hands. They had felt suspicious several times already on noticing how peculiar Gervaise looked when she stood in front of the gold. This time, however, they meant to watch her. And, as she approached nearer, with her feet on the board, the chain-maker rudely called out, without giving any further reply to her question,—

“Look out—take care; you'll be carrying some scraps of gold away on the soles of your shoes. One would think you had greased them on purpose to make the gold stick to them.”

Gervaise slowly drew back. For a moment she leant against a rack, and observing that Madame Lorilleux was looking at her hands, she opened them and showed them, saying softly, without the least anger, like an unfortunate woman who accepts everything,—

“I have taken nothing—you can look ”

And then she went off, for the strong smell of the cabbage soup, and the heat of the workroom, made her feel too ill.

Ah! the Lorilleux did not offer to keep her. Good riddance, devil take them if they opened the door to her again. They had seen enough of her ugly face. They didn't want other people's unhappiness in their rooms, especially when that misery was so well-deserved. They revelled in their selfish delight at being seated so cosily

in a warm room, with a dainty soup getting ready for them. Boche also stretched himself, puffing with his cheeks still more and more, so much, indeed, that his laugh really became annoying. They were all nicely revenged on the Hobbler for her former manners, her blue shop, her dinners, and all the rest. It was quite satisfactory; it showed where the love of good living led one. That's what became of women who were gluttonous and idle and immoral!

"So that is the sort of thing now? Begging for ten sous!" exclaimed Madame Lorilleux behind Gervaise's back. "Wait a bit; I'll lend her ten sous, and no mistake, to go and get drunk with."

Gervaise shuffled along the passage in her slippers, bending her back and feeling heavy. When she reached her door she did not open it—her room terrified her. It would be better to walk about—she would learn patience. As she passed by she reached out her neck, peering into father Bru's kennel under the stairs. There, no doubt, was another one who must have a fine appetite, for he had breakfasted and dined by heart during the last three days. However, he wasn't at home, there was only his hole, and Gervaise felt somewhat jealous, thinking that possibly he had been invited somewhere. Then, as she came to the Bijards', she heard someone complaining, and, as the key was in the lock as usual, she opened the door and went in.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

The room was very decent. One could see that Lalie had swept it very carefully, and arranged everything during the morning. Wretchedness might blow into the room as much as it would, carry off the chattels, and spread all its dirt and refuse about. Lalie, however, came after it and put everything tidy, imparting, at least, some appearance of comfort to the place. She might not be rich, but you could see that there was a housewife in the place. That afternoon her two little ones, Henriette and Jules, had discovered some old pictures, which they were

cutting out in a corner. But Gervaise was greatly astonished to see Lalie herself in bed, looking very pale, with the sheet drawn up to her chin. In bed; indeed, then she must be seriously ill!

"What is the matter with you?" questioned Gervaise, feeling anxious.

Lalie no longer made any moans. She slowly raised her white eyelids, and tried to force her lips to smile, although they were convulsed by a shudder.

"There's nothing wrong with me," she whispered, very softly. "Really nothing at all." Then shutting her eyes again, she added with an effort, "I got fatigued during the last few days, and so I'm idling a little; I'm nursing myself, as you see."

But her childish face, streaked with livid stains, assumed such an expression of anguish that Gervaise, forgetting her own agony, clasped her hands and fell on her knees near the bed. For the last month she had seen the girl holding on by the walls for support when she went about, bent double, indeed, by a cough which seemed to sound hollow as a coffin. Now the poor child could not even cough. She had a hiccough, and drops of blood oozed from the corners of her mouth.

"It isn't my fault if I don't feel quite strong," she murmured, as if relieved. "I've tired myself to-day trying to put things tidy. It's pretty decent, isn't it? And I wanted to clean the windows as well, but my legs went under me. How stupid! However, when one has finished one can go to bed." She paused and then said, "Please see that my little ones are not cutting themselves with the scissors."

After this, she relapsed into silence, trembling and listening to a heavy footfall which was heard coming up the stairs. All at once father Bijard brutally opened the door. As usual he was very tipsy, and his eyes shone with the furious madness derived from the "vitriol" he had swallowed. When he perceived Lalie in bed, he

tapped on his thighs with a sneer, and took the whip from where it hung.

"Ah! name of God! that's too strong," he growled, "we'll just have a laugh. So the cows lie down on their straw at noon, now! Are you making fun of me, you lazy beggar? Come, quick now, up you get."

And he already cracked the whip over the bed. But the child supplicatingly replied—

"Pray, papa, don't—don't strike me. I swear to you you will regret it. Don't strike!"

"Will you jump up?" he roared, still louder "or else I'll tickle your ribs. Jump up, beast of a hound!"

Then she softly said, "I can't—don't you see, I can't? I'm going to die."

Gervaise had thrown herself upon Bijard and torn the whip away from him. He stood stupefied in front of the bed. What was the dirty rogue singing about? Do girls die so young without even having been sick? Some excuse to make him give her loppypops, no doubt. Ah! he'd make inquiries, and if she lied—

"You will see it's the truth," she continued. "As long as I could I avoided annoying you; but be kind now, and say 'adieu' to me, papa."

Bijard wriggled his nose with a suspicion that she was deceiving him. And yet it was true she had a peculiar look, the serious and elongated face of a grown-up person. The breath of death which passed through the room in some degree sobered him. He gazed around like a man awakened from a long sleep, saw the room so tidy, the the two children clean, playing and laughing. And then he fell on a chair, stammering, "Our little mother, our little mother."

These were the only words he could find to say, and yet they were very tender ones for Lalie, who had never been so much spoiled. She comforted her father. What especially vexed her was to go off like this without having perfectly brought her little ones up. He would watch over them, would he not? With her dying breath she

told him how they ought to be cared for and kept clean. But stupefied with the fumes of drink seizing hold of him again, he wagged his head, watching her pass away with an uncertain stare. All sorts of things were touched in him, but he could find no more to say, and he was too utterly burnt with liquor to shed a tear.

"Listen," Lalie went on after a pause, "We owe four francs and seven sous to the baker; you will pay that. Madame Gaudron has one of our irons, which you must get from her. I wasn't able to make any soup to-night, but there's some bread left, and you can warm some potatoes."

Till her last rattle, the poor kitten still remained "the little mother." Assuredly, she could never be replaced! She was dying, because she had had, at her age, a true mother's reason, because her breast was too small and weak for so much maternity. And if her ferocious brute of a father lost this treasure, it was his own fault. After kicking the mother to death, hadn't he murdered the daughter in addition? The two good angels would lie in the pauper's grave, and all that could be in store for him was to "go off the hooks" like a dog in the gutter.

However, Gervaise restrained herself from sobbing. She extended her hands, anxious to ease the child, and as the shred of a sheet was falling she wished to wrap it in and arrange the bed. Then the dying girl's poor little body was visible. Ah, Lord, what wretchedness! what woe! Stones would have wept. Lalie was naked, with only the remnants of a jacket on her shoulders by way of night-gown; yes, naked, with the grievous, bleeding nudity of a martyr.

She had no flesh left; her bones appeared to protrude through her skin. From her ribs to her thighs there extended a number of violet stripes—the marks of the whip imprinted forcibly on her. A livid bruise, moreover, went round her left arm, as if the tender limb, scarcely larger than a lucifer match, had been crushed in a vice. There was also an imperfectly closed wound on her right

leg, left there by some ugly blow, and which opened again and again in the morning, when she went about doing her errand. From head to foot, indeed, she was but one bruise! Oh! this murdering of childhood; those brutal hands crushing this lovely girl; how abominable that such weakness should have such a weighty cross to bear. Again did Gervaise crouch down, no longer thinking of wrapping in the sheet, but overwhelmed by the pitiful sight of this martyrdom; and her trembling lips appeared to be seeking for words of prayer.

"Madame Coupeau," murmured the child, "I beg you—"

With her little arms she sought to draw up the sheet again, ashamed as it were for her father. Bijard, as stupefied as ever, with his eyes on the body which was his own work, still wagged his head, but more slowly, like a worried animal might do.

When she had covered Lalie up once more, Gervaise felt she could not remain there any longer. The dying girl was growing weaker and ceased speaking; all that was left to her was her gaze—the dark look she had as a resigned and thoughtful child, and which she now fixed on her two little ones who were still cutting out their pictures. The room was growing gloomy, and Bijard was working off his liquor while the poor girl was in her death agonies. No, no, life was too awful. How terrible it was, how terrible. And Gervaise went off, and walked down the stairs unwittingly, her head wandering and so full of disgust that she would willingly have thrown herself under the wheels of an omnibus to have closed everything with her own existence.

As she hastened on, growling against cursed fate, she suddenly found herself before the place where Coupeau pretended that he worked. Her legs had taken her there, and now her stomach began singing its song again, the complaint of hunger in ninety verses—a complaint she knew by heart. Nevertheless, if she caught Coupeau as he was leaving, she would be able to pounce upon the

money at once, and buy some meat. A short hour's waiting at the utmost; she could surely stay that out, though she had sucked her thumbs since the day before.

It was in the Rue de la Charbonniere, at the corner of the Rue de Chartes, an open space where the wind played at hide and seek. But walking about the pavement didn't warm her. It would have been better if one had only had a fur mantle. The sky kept its ugly leaden hue, and the snow, amassed above, covered the neighbourhood with an icy cap. Nothing fell, but the air was profoundly quiet, fortelling a complete disguise for Paris by-and-by—a pretty ball dress, quite white and new. Gervaise raised her nose, begging Providence not to allow the muslin to fall yet awhile. She stamped her feet, looked at a grocer's shop over the way, and then she turned on her heels, as it was not worth while sharpening her appetite by the contemplation of good things. The few passers-by strode rapidly along, wrapped up in warm cloaks; naturally enough one does not care to dawdle when the cold is griping one's whole body. However, Gervaise perceived four or five women who were mounting guard like herself outside the door of the zinc-works; unfortunate creatures, of course—wives watching for the pay to keep it from going to the dram-shop. There was a tall creature, with a gendarme's face, stuck against the wall, prepared to spring on her husband as soon as he showed himself. A dark little woman with a delicate, humble air was walking about on the other side of the road. Another one, a fat creature, had brought her two little ones with her, and was dragging them along, one on either hand, and both of them shivering and sobbing. And all these women, Gervaise like the others, passed and repassed, exchanging glances, but without making any remark to one another. A pleasant meeting most assuredly. They didn't need to make friends to learn what number they lived at. They could all hang out the same signboard, "Misery & Co." It seemed to make one feel even colder to see

them walk about in silence, passing each other in this fearful January weather.

However, nobody as yet left the zinc-works. But presently one workman appeared, then two, and then three, but these were doubtless decent fellows who took their pay home regularly, for they jerked their heads significantly as they perceived the shadows wandering up and down. The tall creature stuck closer than ever to the side of the door, and suddenly fell upon a pale little man, who was prudently stretching his head out. Oh, it was soon settled. She searched him and collared his cash. Caught, no more money, not even enough to pay for a dram. Then the little man, looking very annoyed and cast down, followed his gendarme weeping like a child. The workmen were still coming out; and as the fat mother with the two children got near the door, a tall fellow with a cunning look, who noticed her, went quickly inside again to warn her husband; and when the latter arrived he had stuffed a couple of cart wheels away, two beautiful new five franc pieces, one in each of his shoes. He took one of the kids on his arm, and went off telling crams to his old woman, who was complaining. There were other workmen also, mournful-looking fellows, who carried in their clenched fists the pay for the three or five days' work they had done during a fortnight, who were reproaching themselves with their own laziness, and took drunkard's oaths. But the saddest thing of all was the sorrow of the dark little woman, with the humble, delicate look; her husband, a handsome fellow, went right off under her very nose, and indeed so brutally that he almost knocked her down, and she went home alone, stumbling past the shops and weeping all the tears in her body.

At last the file came to an end. Gervaise, who stood erect in the middle of the street, was still watching the door. The look-out seemed a bad one. Two workmen who were late appeared on the threshold, but there was still no sign of Coupeau. And when she asked the

workmen if Coupeau wasn't coming, they replied to her, being in the secret, that he had just gone off by the back-door with Lantimeche. Gervaise understood what this meant. Another of Coupeau's lies; she could whistle for him if she liked. Then, shuffling along in her worn-out shoes, she went slowly down the Rue de la Charbonniere. Her dinner was going off in front of her, and she shuddered as she saw it running away in the yellow twilight. This time it was all over. Not a copper, not a hope, nothing but night and hunger. Ah! a fine night to "hop the twig," this dirty night which was falling over her shoulders.

She was walking heavily up the Rue des Poissonniers when she all at once heard Coupeau's voice. Yes, he was there, in the "Little Civet," letting Mes-Bottes stand him. That comical chap, Mes-Bottes had been sly enough at the end of last summer to marry in authentic form a lady who, although rather advanced in years, had still preserved considerable traces of beauty. She was a lady of the Rue des Martyrs, none of your Barriere outcasts. And you should have seen this fortunate mortal, living like a man of means, with his hands in his pockets, well clad and well fed. He could scarcely be recognised, so fat had he grown. And so Coupeau squinted with admiration at Mes-Bottes. Why, the lucky dog even had a gold ring on his little finger.

Gervaise laid her hand on Coupeau's shoulder just as he was coming out of the "Little Civet."

"I say, I'm waiting; I'm hungry. Is that all you stand?"

But he shut her up in fine fashion.

"You're hungry, eh? Eat you hand then, and keep the other for to-morrow."

He considered it very stupid to do the dramatic in other people's presence. What, he hadn't worked, and yet the bakers kneaded bread all the same. Did she take him for a fool, to come and try and frighten him with her stories?

"Do you want me to turn thief?" she muttered in a husky voice.

Mes-Bottes caressed his chin with a conciliatory touch.

"No, that's forbidden," said he. "But when a woman knows how to arrange——"

And Coupeau interrupted him to cry "Bravo!" Yes, a woman always ought to know how to manage. But his wife had always been a helpless creature. It would be her fault if they died on the straw. Then he went back to his admiration for Mes-Bottes. How awfully fine he looked, the fellow! A regular landlord; with clean linen and well-made shoes! They were no common stuff. His wife, at all events, knew how to row the boat!

The two men walked towards the outer Boulevard, and Gervaise followed them. After a pause, she went on talking, behind Coupeau,—“I'm so hungry; I was trusting to you. You must find me something to bite at.”

He did not answer, and she repeated, in a tone of despairing agony,—“Really, is that all you stand?”

“But, name of God! I've got no cash,” he roared, turning round in a fury. “Just leave me alone, eh? or else I'll strike.”

He was already raising his fist. She drew back, and seemed to take a resolution. “Go on, then; I'll leave you. I shall be quite able to find something.”

The zinc-worker laughed at this shot. He affected to make a jest of the matter, and impelled her onwards without seeming to do so. That was, indeed, a fine idea of hers! If she met an old friend he recommended the “Capuchin” restaurant, where capital grub was to be had in the private rooms. And as she went off along the Boulevard, pale and furious, he called out after her,—“Listen, bring me back some dessert. I like cakes.”

With infernal words ringing in her ears. Gervaise walked away. But when she found herself alone in the midst of the crowd, she slackened her pace. She was quite resolute. Between thieving and doing that, she preferred to do that, for at all events she wouldn't harm

anyone. She would only dispose of her own. No doubt, it wasn't proper. But what was proper and what was improper were sorely mixed up together in her brain. When one is dying of hunger, he doesn't philosophise, he eats whatever bread turns up. She had gone along as far as the Chaussee-Clignancourt. It seemed as if the night would never come. However, she followed the Boulevards like a lady who is taking a stroll before dinner. The district in which she felt so ashamed, so greatly was it being embellished, was now full of fresh air. The Boulevard Magenta, ascending from the heart of Paris, and the Boulevard Ornane going off into the country, had pierced through the old Barriere, levelling a large number of houses; and at the sides of the two long avenues, still white with plaster, one could see the Faubourg-Passonniere and the Rue des Poissonniers, dark, dingy, and crooked. The demolition of the octroi wall had long ago widened the outer Boulevard, permitting space for two paved roads, with a central foot-walk planted with four rows of scrubby plane trees. The view stretched as far as the horizon, along the broad highways crowded with people, and ending in a chaos of half-built houses. But among the lofty new buildings there remained many tottering hovels. Between the carved facades there were a number of black dens, standing back, perfect kennels, with rags hanging from their windows. Amid the rising luxury of Paris, the wretchedness of the faubourg was evident, surrounding the hastily-erected new piles with dirt.

Lost in the crowd on the broad footway, walking past the little plane trees, Gervaise felt herself alone and abandoned. The vistas of the avenues appeared to make her all the more hungry. And to reflect that among this flood of people there were many in comfortable circumstances, and yet not a Christian who could guess her position, and slip a ten-sous piece into her hand! Yes, it was too great and too beautiful; her head swam round, and her legs tottered under this broad expanse of

grey sky stretched over so vast a space. The twilight had the dirty-yellowish tinge of Parisian evenings, a tint that gives you a longing to die at once, so ugly does street life appear to one. The horizon was becoming indistinct, assuming a mud-coloured tinge as it were. Gervaise, who was already weary, met all the workpeople returning home. At this hour of the day the ladies in bonnets, and well-dressed gentlemen living in the new houses, mingled with the people, with files of men and women still pale from inhaling the tainted atmosphere of workshops and workrooms. From the Boulevard Magenta and the Rue du Faubourg-Poissonniere came bands of people, made breathless by their uphill walk. As the omnibuses and the cabs rolled by less noiselessly among the vans and trucks returning home empty at a gallop, and ever-increasing swarm of blouses and blue vests were covering the pavement. Commissionaires returned with their satchels on their backs. Two workmen, with hasty steps, took long strides side by side, speaking to each other in loud voices, with any amount of gesticulation, but without looking at one another; others who were alone, in overcoats and caps, walked along the kerb-stones with their noses lowered; others, again, followed in parties of five or six, coming after each other, with pale eyes and their hands in their pockets, and not exchanging a word. Some still had their pipes, which had gone out, between their teeth. Four masons stuck their white faces out of the windows of a cab which they had hired between them, and on the roof of which their mortar troughs were rocking to and fro. House-painters were swinging their pots; a zinc-worker was returning laden with a long ladder, with which he almost poked people's eyes out; whilst a belated dealer in filter-taps, with his box on his back, played the tune of "The Good King Dagobert" on his little trumpet. Ah! the sad music, a fitting accompaniment to the tread of the flock, the tread of the weary beasts of burden.

Another day's work over! Really worktime was too

long and came too frequent. Hardly time to eat and drink, and digest one's food ; and it would be daylight again, and the collar of wretchedness must be put round the neck again. But, nevertheless, the plucky ones whistled, stamping on the pavement, and darting along, erect, with their mouths turned towards their supper. And Gervaise let the crowd flow past her, careless of being knocked against, elbowed to the right, and elbowed to the left, and still carried onward by the tide. Men haven't the time to indulge in gallantry when they are bent double with fatigue, and pinched by hunger.

All at once, on raising her eyes, she noticed the old Hotel Boncœur in front of her. After being an ill-famed cafe, which the police had closed, the little house was now abandoned ; the shutters were covered with posters, the lantern was broken, and the whole building was rotting and crumbling away from top to bottom, with its smudgy, claret-coloured paint quite mouldy. The stationer's and tobacconist's shops were still there. In the rear, over some low buildings, you could see the leprous facades of several five-storeyed houses rearing their tumble-down outlines against the sky. The "Grand Balcony" dancing hall, alone, was no longer to the fore ; some sugar-cutting works, which hissed continually, had been installed in the hall with the ten flaming windows. And yet it was here, in this den—the Hotel Boncœur—that the whole of her cursed life had begun. Gervaise stood gazing at the window of the first floor, from which hung a broken shutter, and recalled to mind her youth with Lantier, their first quarrels and the ignoble way in which he had abandoned her. Ah ! it mattered not, she was young then, and it all seemed gay to her, seen from a distance. Only twenty years, good heavens ! and yet she had now fallen to the pavement. Then the sight of the lodging-house oppressed her, and she walked up the Boulevard in the direction of Montmartre.

The night was gathering, but children were still

playing on the heaps of sand between the benches. The march past went on, the work-girls passed by, trotting along and hurrying to make up for the time they had lost in looking in at the shop windows; one tall girl who had stood still, left her hand in that of a big fellow, who had accompanied her, three doors off from her home; others, as they parted from each other, made appointments for the same evening at the "Grand Hall of Folly" or the "Black Ball." In the midst of the groups, a glazier went by, carrying sheets of glass upon his back and under his arms. A plumber, harnessed with leather braces, was drawing a truck, and almost got himself crushed by an omnibus, owing to his own carelessness. Among the crowd, which was now growing thinner, there were several women running with bare heads; after lighting the fire, they had come downstairs again, and were hurriedly making their purchases for dinner; they jostled the people they met, dashed into the bakers' and the pork butchers', and went off again with all haste, their provisions in their hands. There were little girls of eight years old, who had been despatched on errands, and who went along past the shops, pressing long loaves of four pounds' weight, as big as they were themselves, against their breasts, as if these loaves had been lovely yellow dolls; at times these little ones forgot themselves for five minutes or so, in front of some pictures in a shop window, and rested their cheeks against the bread. Then the flow subsided, the groups became fewer and farther between, the working-classes had gone home; and as the gas blazed now that the day's toil was past, idleness and amusement seemed to wake up.

Ah, yes, Gervaise had ended her day! She was more fatigued even than all this mob of toilers who had jostled her as they went by. She might lie down there and die, for work would have nothing more to do with her, and she had toiled enough during her life to say,—“Who's turn now? I've had enough.” At the present moment everyone was eating. It was, in fact, the end; the sun

had blown out its candle ; the night would be a long one. Good Lord ! To stretch oneself at one's ease and never get up again, to reflect that one had put one's tools by for good, and that one could lie lazy for ever ! That's what is good, after wearing oneself out for twenty years ! And Gervaise, as hunger twisted her body, thought, in spite of herself, of the fete days, the dissipations and the revelry of her life ; of one occasion especially, an awfully cold day, a mid-lent Thursday. She had enjoyed herself amazingly well. She was very pretty, fair-haired, and fresh-looking at that time. Her wash-house in the Rue Neuve had chosen her as queen in spite of her lameness. And then they had had an outing on the Boulevards, in carriages decked with green stuff, in the midst of stylish people who ogled her. Real gentlemen put up their glasses as if she had been a real queen. In the evening there was a wonderful spread, and then they had danced till daylight. Queen, yes, queen ! with a crown and a sash for twenty-four hours—twice round the clock ! And now, oppressed by hunger, she gazed on the ground, as if she were searching for the gutter in which she had let her fallen majesty tumble.

She lifted her eyes once more. She was in front of the slaughter-houses, which were being pulled down ; through the gaps in the facade she could see the dark, stinking courtyards still damp with blood. And when she had gone down the Boulevard again, she also saw the Lariboisiere Hospital, with its long grey wall, above which she could distinguish the sad fanlike wings pierced with windows at even distances. A door in the wall terrified the district ; it was the door of the dead, in solid oak, and without a crack, as stern and as silent as a tombstone. Then to flee from her own thoughts, she hurried further down till she came to the railway bridge. The high parapets of riveted sheet-iron hid the line from view ; she could only distinguish a corner of the station standing out against the luminous horizon of Paris, with a vast roof black with coal dust. Through the clear

space she could hear the engines whistling and the trucks being shunted, in token of colossal hidden activity. Then a train passed by, leaving Paris, with puffing breath and a growing rumble. And all she saw of this train was a white plume, a sudden gust of steam which rose above the parapet and then evaporated. But the bridge had shaken, and she herself appeared impressed by this departure at full speed. She turned round as if to follow the invisible engine, the noise of which was dying away. In this direction she divined the existence of the country and fresh air, far away beyond a cutting with tall isolated houses to the right and left, put up there without order, now showing their fronts, and now unplastered side-walls, while others were painted over with giant advertisements, and all of them dirtied by the smoke from the engines with the same yellowish tinge. Ah ! if she had only been able to go off like that, far from these abodes of misery and suffering. Perhaps she might then have began her life over again. Then she found herself stupidly reading the bills posted on the sheet-iron parapet. They were of every tint. One of them—a little one, of a sweet shade of blue—promised fifty francs reward for a dog which had been lost. That animal had been loved, plainly enough.

Gervaise slowly began her walk again. In the smoky-shaded fog which was falling, the gas lamps were being lighted up ; and the long avenues, which had grown black and indistinct, suddenly showed themselves plainly again, sparkling to their full length and piercing through the night, even to the vague darkness of the horizon. A great gust swept by ; the widened spaces were lit up with girdles of little flames, shining under the far-stretching moonless sky. It was the time when, from one end of the Boulevard to the other, the dram-shops and the dancing halls flamed gaily as the first glasses were merrily drunk and the first dance commenced. It was the great fortnightly pay-day, and the pavement was crowded with jostling revellers out for a spree. There was a breath of merry-making in the air—of fine revelry, and pleasure by

night. Men were satisfying themselves in the eating-houses; through the lighted windows she could see people feeding, with their mouths full, and laughing without taking the trouble to swallow. Drunkards were already planted in the wine-shops, squabbling and gesticulating. And there was a cursed noise on all sides; voices shouting amid the continual clatter of feet on the pavement.

"I say! are you coming to sip?" "Make haste, old man; I'll pay for a glass of bottled wine." "Hallo! here's Pauline! Sha'n't we just laugh!" The doors swung to and fro, letting a smell of wine and a sound of cornet playing escape into the open air. There was a gathering in front of old Colombe's Assommoir, which was lit up like a cathedral for high mass; and one might easily have said that a real ceremony was going on, for several capital chaps, with rounded paunches and swollen cheeks, looking for all the world like professional choristers, were singing inside. They were celebrating Saint-Pay, of course—a very amiable saint, who no doubt keeps the cash-box in Paradise. Only, on seeing how gaily the evening began, the retired petty tradesmen, who had taken their wives out for a stroll, nodded their heads and repeated that there would be any number of drunken men in Paris that night. And the night stretched out very dark, dead-like and icy above this revelry, perforated only with lines of gas-lamps that seemed to reach to the four corners of Heaven.

Gervaise stood in front of the Assommoir, thinking that if she had had a couple of sous she could have gone inside and drunk a glass. No doubt a glass would have quieted her hunger. Ah, what a number of drams she had drunk in her time! Liquor seemed good stuff to her after all. And from outside she watched the fuddling machine, realising that her wretchedness was due to it, and yet dreaming of finishing herself off with brandy on the day she had some coin. But a shudder passed through her hair, as she perceived that it was now

almost dark. Well, the night time was approaching. She must have some pluck and show herself coaxing if she didn't want to croak in the midst of the general mirth. Gazing at other people guzzling didn't exactly kill her hunger. She slackened her pace again and looked about her. There was a darker shade under the trees. Few people passed along; only folks in a hurry who quickly crossed the Boulevards. And on the broad, dark, deserted footway, where the sound of the revelry died away, women were standing by and waiting. They stayed for long intervals, motionless, patient, and as stiff-looking as the scrubby little plane trees; then they quietly began to move, dragging their slippers over the frozen soil, taking a dozen steps or so, and then waiting again, rooted as if to the ground. There was one of them with a huge body and insectlike arms and legs, wearing a black silk frock, with a yellow scarf over her head; there was another, tall and bony, who was bare-headed, and wore a servant's apron; and others, too—old ones plastered up, and young ones so dirty that a rag-picker would not have fished them up. However, Gervaise tried to learn the trade by imitating them; girlish-like emotion tightened her throat; she was scarcely aware whether she felt ashamed or not—she appeared to be living in a horrible dream. For a quarter of an hour she remained standing erect. Men hurried by without even turning their heads. Then she moved about in her turn, and, venturing to accost a man who was whistling with his hands in his pockets, she murmured, in a stifled voice,—

“Sir, just listen.”

The man gave her a side glance and then shot off, whistling all the louder.

Gervaise grew bolder, and, with her stomach empty, she became absorbed in this hunt, fiercely rushing after her dinner, which was still running farther away. She walked about for a long while, without reflecting on the flight of time or of the direction she took. Around her

the dark mute women went to and fro under the trees as wild beasts do in a cage. They stepped out of the shade like apparitions, and passed under the light of a gas-lamp with their pale faces fully visible ; then they grew vague again as they went off into the darkness, with a white strip of petticoat swaying to and fro. Men let themselves be stopped at times, spoke jokingly, and then started off again, laughing. Others discreetly went away ten paces behind a woman. There was considerable muttering, quarrelling in an undertone, and furious remarks, which suddenly subsided into profound silence. And as far as Gervaise went she saw these women standing like sentinels in the night ; they appeared to be placed along the whole length of the Boulevard. As soon as she met one, she saw another twenty paces farther on, and the file stretched out unceasingly. Paris was entirely guarded. She grew enraged on finding herself disdained, and altering her place she now perambulated between the Chaussee de Clignancourt and the Grande Rue of La Chapelle.

“ Sir, just listen.”

But the men passed on. She started from the slaughter houses, which stunk of blood. She glanced on her way at the old Hotel Boncœur, now shut. She passed in front of the Lariboisiere Hospital, and mechanically counted the number of windows that were shining with a pale quiet glimmer, like that of night-lights at the bedside of some agonising sufferers. She crossed the railway-bridge as the trains rushed by with a noisy rumble, rending the air in twain with their shrill whistling. Ah ! how mournful everything seemed at night time. Then she turned on her heels again, and sickened her eyes with the sight of the same houses, doing this ten and twenty times without pausing, without sitting down for a minute on a bench. No ; no one would have anything to do with her. Her shame seemed to be increased by this disdain. She went down towards the hospital again, and then returned towards the

slaughter-houses It was her last promenade—from the blood-stained courtyards, where animals were stricken low, down to the pale hospital wards, where death stiffened the patients stretched between the sheets. It was between these two establishments that she had passed her life.

“Sir, just listen.”

All at once she perceived her shadow on the ground. When she came near a gas-lamp it gradually became less vague, till it stood out at last in full force—an enormous shadow it was, positively grotesque, so portly had she become. Her body, breast, and hips, all equally flabby, jostled one another as it were. She walked so lame that the shadow bobbed almost topsy turvy at every step she took; it looked like a real Punch! Then as she left the street-lamp behind her, the Punch grew taller, becoming, in fact, colossal, filling the whole Boulevard, bobbing to and fro in such style that it seemed destined to knock its nose against the trees or the houses. Good Lord! how frightful she was! She had never before realised her disfigurement so thoroughly. She could not help gazing at her own shadow; indeed, she waited on for the gas-lamps, still keeping her eyes on the Punch as it bobbed about. Ah! She had a pretty companion beside her! What a figure! It ought to attract men at once! And at the reflection of her unsightliness, she lowered her voice, and only just dared to stutter behind the passers-by,—

“Sir, just listen.”

Moreover, it was growing very late. Matters were getting bad in the district. The eating-houses had shut up, and voices, coarse with drink, could be heard arguing in the wineshops. Revelry was turning to quarrelling and blows. A big ragged chap roared out,—“I’ll knock you into rags; just number yer bones.” A girl had quarrelled with a fellow outside a dancing place, and was calling him “dirty blackguard” and “sick pig,” whilst he on his side kept on repeating,—“What of your sister?” as if he could think of nothing else. Drink seemed to have imparted a fierce desire to give way to blows, and the passers-

by, ~~who~~ were now less numerous, had pale, contracted faces. There was a battle at last; one drunken fellow came down smash, with all fours raised in the air, whilst his comrade, thinking he had "closed his account," ran off with his heavy shoes clattering.

There were bands of fellows braying indecent songs, then a deep silence came, interrupted only by the hiccoughs and the dull falls of drunkards. The fortnightly spree always ended this way; so much wine had flowed since six o'clock, that now it was about to float over the pavement. True, the neighbourhood was really clean! If a foreigner had visited it before the morning sweeping, he would have gone away with a very nice opinion indeed. But the drunkards were at home, and they didn't care a curse for Europe. Name of God! knives slipped out of the pockets, and the little fete ended in bloodshed. Women walked hastily along; men prowled round with wolves' eyes; the night grew thicker, swollen with abomination.

Gervaise still went hobbling up and down, with the idea of walking for ever. At times she felt drowsy and went to sleep, rocked, as it were, by her lame leg; then she looked round her with a start, and observed she had walked a hundred paces unconsciously. Her feet were swelling in her ragged shoes. She felt better for some time, so weary and empty was she. The last clear thought that occupied her mind was that her scamp of a daughter was perhaps eating oysters at that very moment. Then everything became cloudy; and albeit she remained with open eyes, it required too great an effort for her to think. And the only sensation that remained to her, in her utter annihilation, was that it was frightfully cold, so sharply, mortally cold, she had never known the like before. Why, even dead people could not be so cold in their graves. With an effort she raised her head, and something seemed to lash her face. It was the snow, which had at last begun to fall from the smoky sky—a fine thick snow, which the breeze swept round and round. For three days it had been expected. It fell just at the right time.

DRINK

Awakened by the first gusts, Gervaise began faster. Eager to get home, men were running, with their shoulders already white. And, as she all at once saw one who, unlike them, was coming slowly towards her under the trees, she went up to him, and again said,—

“Sir, just listen——”

The man had stopped, but he did not appear to have heard her. He held out his hand, and muttered in a low voice,—

“Charity, if you please !”

They looked at one another. Ah ! good God ! They were at this point—father Bru begging, Madame Coupeau on the street ! They remained stupefied in front of each other. They could shake hands now. The old workman had prowled about the entire evening, not daring to stop anyone, and the first person he accosted was as hungry as himself. Lord, was it not pitiful ! That old man had toiled for fifty years, and now to be obliged to beg ! She to have been one of the most prosperous washerwomen in the Rue de la Goutte-d’Or, and to end beside the gutter ! They still gazed at one another. Then, without saying a word, they went off in different directions under the lashing snow.

It was a perfect tempest. On these heights, in the midst of these large open spaces, the fine snow whirled round and round, as if the wind proceeded from the four corners of heaven. One could not see ten paces off ; everything was confused in the midst of this flying dust. The surroundings had disappeared, the Boulevard appeared to be dead, as if the storm had stretched the silence of its white sheet over the hiccoughs of the last drunkards. Gervaise still went on, blinded, lost. She felt her way by touching the trees. As she hobbled forwards ; the gas-lamps shone out amidst the whiteness like torches. Then, suddenly, whenever she crossed an open space, these lights failed her ; she was wrapped up in the whirling snow, unable to distinguish anything to

guide her. Below stretched the ground, vaguely white; grey walls surrounded her; and when she stopped, hesitating, and turning her head, she divined that behind this icy veil extended the vast avenues with endless vistas of gas-lamps—the black and deserted Infinite of Paris asleep.

She was standing at the point where the outer Boulevard meets the Boulevards Magenta and Ornano, thinking of lying down on the ground, when all at once she heard a footfall. She commenced to run, but the snow blinded her, and the footsteps went off, without her being able to tell whether it was to the right or to the left. At last, however, she could discern a man's broad shoulders, a dark form which was disappearing amid the snow. Oh! she'd have that one; he shouldn't escape from her! And she ran on all the faster, reached him, and caught him by the blouse.

"Sir, sir, just listen——"

The man turned round. It was Goujet.

So now she accosted Golden-Jaws! But what had she done on earth that Providence should torture her like this? It was the crowning blow—to stumble against Goujet, and be seen by him, pale and begging, like a Barriere mendicant. And this occurred just under a gas-lamp; she could see her deformed shadow swaying on the snow like a real caricature. You would have said she was drunk. Good God! not to have a crust of bread, or a drop of wine in her body, and to be taken for a drunken woman! it was her own fault; why did she booze? Goujet, no doubt, thought she had been drinking, and that she was up to some nasty tricks.

However, he gazed at her while the snow scattered daisies over his beautiful yellow beard. Then, as she lowered her head and stepped back from him, he detained her.

"Come," said he.

And he walked on first. She followed him. They both crossed the silent district, gliding noiselessly along the

walls. Poor Madame Goujet had died of rheumatism in the month of October. Goujet still lived in the little house in the Rue Neuve, living gloomily alone. On this occasion he was belated because he had sat up nursing a sick comrade. When he had opened the door and lighted a lamp, he turned towards Gervaise, who had stayed humbly on the threshold. Then, in a low voice, as if he were afraid his mother could still hear him, he exclaimed,—
“Come in.”

The first room, Madame Goujet's, was preserved piously in the condition she had left it. On a chair near the window lay the tambour by the side of the large arm chair, which appeared to be waiting for the old lace worker. The bed was made, and she could have stretched herself beneath the sheets if she could have left the cemetery to come and spend the evening with her child. There was something solemn, a perfume of honesty and goodness about the room.

“Come in,” repeated the blacksmith, in a louder tone.

She went in, half frightened, like a girl of bad character gliding into a respectable place. He was very pale, and trembled at the thought of ushering a woman like this into his dead mother's home. They crossed the room on tiptoe, as if they were ashamed to be heard. Then when he had pushed Gervaise into his own room, he shut the door. Here he was at home. It was the narrow closet she was acquainted with; a schoolboy's room, with a little iron bedstead hung with white curtains. On the walls the engravings cut out of illustrated newspapers had gathered and spread, and they now reached up to the ceiling. The room looked so pure that Gervaise dared not advance, but retreated as far as she could from the lamp. Then, without a word, in a transpost as it were, he tried to seize hold of her and press her in his arms. But her strength was giving way, and she murmured,—

“Oh, my God! oh, my God!”

The fire in the stove, having been covered with coke-dust, was still alight, and the remains of a stew which

Goujet had put to warm, thinking he should come back to dinner, was smoking before the cinders. Gervaise, who felt her numbness leave her in the warmth of this room, would have gone down on all fours to eat out of the saucepan. Her hunger was stronger than her will; her stomach felt as if rent in two; and she stooped down with a sigh. But Goujet had at last discovered the truth. He placed the stew on the table, cut some bread, and poured her out a glass of wine.

"Thanks! thanks!" she said. "Oh, how good you are! Thanks!"

She stammered; she could hardly articulate. When she caught hold of her fork she began to tremble so violently that she let it fall again. The hunger that had taken possession of her made her wag her head. She carried the food to her mouth with her fingers. As she stuffed the first potato into her mouth, she burst out sobbing. Big tears coursed down her cheeks and fell on to her bread. She ate there still, gluttonously devouring this bread which was thus moistened by her tears, with her breath coming very hard all the while. Goujet made her drink, to prevent her from stifling, and her glass chinked, as it were, against her teeth.

"Will you have some more bread?" he asked in an undertone.

She wept; she said "No," she said "Yes," she didn't know. Ah, Lord! how nice and yet wretched it is to eat when one is starving.

And standing before her, he gazed at her all the while; under the bright light cast by the lamp-shade he could see her well. How aged and altered she appeared! The warmth was melting the snow on her hair and clothes, and she was dripping. Her poor, bobbing head was quite grey; there were any number of grey locks which the wind had disarranged. Her neck sank into her shoulders, as it were, and she had become so fat and ugly, one might have cried on observing the change. And he remembered their love, when she was quite rosy, working with her

irons, and showing the child-like plait which set such a charming necklace round her throat. In those times he had watched her for hours, joyful to look at her. Later she had come to the forge, and there they had enjoyed themselves whilst he beat the iron, and she stood by, watching his hammer dance. Ah! in those days, how often he had bit his pillow of a night time, longing to have her for his wife! Oh! he would have crushed her had he taken hold of her then, so great was his love. And now she was his—he could take her! She was finishing her bread, soaking it in her tears which had fallen into the sauce-pan—her big silent tears which still rolled down on to her food.

Gervaise rose: she had finished. She remained for a moment with her head lowered, and uncomfortable. Then, thinking she had detected a gleam in his eyes, she lifted her hand to her jacket and unfastened the top button. But Goujet had fallen on his knees, and taking hold of her hands, he exclaimed, in soft accents,—

“I love you, Madame Gervaise; oh! I love you still and in spite of everything, I swear it to you.”

“Oh, do not say that, Monsieur Goujet!” she cried, maddened to see him bent thus at her feet. “No, don’t say that; you distress me.”

And as he repeated that he could never love twice in his life, she became yet more despairing.

“No, no, I am too ashamed. For the love of God, get up. It is my place to be on the ground.”

He rose, he shook all over, and he stammered,—

“Will you permit me to kiss you?”

Overcome with amazement and emotion she could not speak, but she assented with a nod of the head. After all, she was his; he could do what he liked with her. But he merely put out his lips.

“That is enough between us, Madame Gervaise,” he muttered. “It is all our friendship, is it not?”

He kissed her on the forehead on a lock of her grey hair. He had not kissed anyone since his mother’s

death. His dearest Gervaise alone remained to him in life. And then when he had kissed her with so much respect, he fell back across his bed with sobs rising in his throat. And Gervaise could not stay there longer. It was too wretched and too awful that they should meet again under such circumstances when one loved.

"I love you, Monsieur Goujet!" she exclaimed. "I love you dearly also. Oh! it isn't possible: I understand it. Adieu, adieu! it would suffocate us both."

And she darted through Madame Goujet's room and found herself outside on the pavement once more. When she recovered her senses, she had rung at the door in the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or, and Boche was pulling the string. The house was perfectly dark, and in the black night, the yawning, dilapidated porch looked like an open mouth. To reflect that she had been ambitious of having a corner in this barracks! Had her ears been stopped up there, that she had not been able to hear the cursed music of despair which sounded behind the walls? Since she had set foot in the place she had commenced to go down hill. Yes, it must bring bad luck to shut oneself up in these huge workmen's houses: the cholera of wretchedness was contagious there. That night everyone appeared to have croaked. She only heard the Boches snoring on the right-hand side; while Lantier and Virginie on the left were purring like a couple of cats who are not asleep, but have their eyes shut and feel warm. In the courtyard she fancied she was in a perfect cemetery; the snow paved the ground with white; the high frontages, livid grey in tint, rose up unlighted like ruined walls, and not a sigh could be heard; it appeared as if a whole village, stiffened with cold and hunger, were buried here. She had to step over a black gutter—water from the dye-works—which smoked and streaked the whiteness of the snow with its muddy course. It was the colour of her thoughts. The beautiful light blue and pink waters had long since flowed away!

Then, whilst ascending the six flights in the dark, she

could not keep from laughing ; an ugly laugh, which hurt her. She remembered her ideal of former days ; to work quietly, always having bread to eat and a tidy home to sleep in, to bring up her children not to be thrashed, and to die in her bed. No, really it was droll how all that was becoming realised ! She no longer worked, she no longer ate, she slept on filth, her daughter frequented all sorts of wicked places, and her husband beat her at all hours of the day ; all that was left for her to do was to die on the pavement, and it would not take long, if on getting into her room, she could only screw up enough courage to fling herself out of the window. Was it not enough to make one think that she had asked Heaven for thirty thousand francs a year and no end of esteem ? Not even pap and a nest, that is the common lot.

What increased her ugly laugh was the remembrance of her grand hope of retiring into the country after twenty years spent in ironing. Well ! she was on her way to the country. She was about to have her green corner in the Pere-Lachaise cemetery.

When she came into the passage, she was like a mad woman. Her poor heart was whirling round. In her breast her great grief was that she had bid the blacksmith an eternal farewell. All was ended between them—they would never see each other more. Then, more than that, all her other thoughts of misfortune pressed upon her and almost made her head split. As she passed, she put her nose in at the Bijards' and beheld Lalie dead, with a look of contentment on her face at having at last departed from life, and slumbering for ever. Ah, well ! children were luckier than grown-up people ! And as a glimmer of light passed under old Bazouge's door, she walked boldly in, seized with a mania for going off on the same journey as the child.

That old joker Bazouge had come home that night in an extraordinary state of gaiety. He had had such a spree, that he was snoring on the ground, in spite of the temperature ; and that, no doubt, did not prevent him

from dreaming something pleasant, for he appeared to be laughing while asleep. The candle, which he had not put out, lighted up his old garments, his black cloak which he had pulled over his knees, as though it had been a rug.

On seeing him Gervaise uttered such a deep wailing that he awoke.

"Name of God! shut the door! It's so cold! Ah! it's you! What's wrong? what do you want?"

Then Gervaise, stretching out her arms, no longer knowing what she stammered, began passionately to implore him.

"Oh! take me away; I've had enough; I want to go off. You mustn't bear any spite against me. I didn't know, my God! One never knows until one's ready. Oh! yes one's glad to go one day! Take me away, take me away, and I shall give you thanks."

And she fell on her knees, all shaken with a desire which made her turn ghastly pale. Never before had she thus dragged herself at a man's feet. Old Bazouge's face, with his mouth all on one side and his hide begrimed with the dust of funerals, appeared to her as beautiful and resplendent as a sun. The old fellow, who was hardly awake, thought, however, that it was some practical joke.

"I say now," he murmured, "no jokes!"

"Take me away," repeated Gervaise, more imploringly still. "You recollect, I knocked one evening against the partition; then I said it wasn't true, because I was still a fool. But see! give me your hands, I'm no longer afraid. Take me away to by by; you'll see how quiet I'll be. Oh! that's all I care for. Oh! I'll love you so much!"

Bazouge, ever gallant, thought that he ought not to be hasty with a lady who appeared to have taken such a fancy to him. She was tumbling to pieces, but all the same what remained was very fine, particularly when she was excited.

"What you say's very true," said he, in a manner as if

convinced. "I packed up three more to-day, who would only have been too glad to have given me a little for myself, if they could have got their hands to their pockets. But, little woman, it's not so easily settled as all that—"

"Take me away, take me away," continued Gervaise, "I want to go off—"

"Ah! but there's a little operation to be gone through beforehand—you know, couic!"

And he made a noise in his throat, as though he were swallowing his tongue. Then, looking on this as a good joke, he chuckled.

Gervaise slowly rose to her feet. So he, too, could do nothing for her. She went to her room and flung herself on her straw, feeling stupid, and regretting she had eaten. Ah! no indeed, wretchedness did not kill fast enough.

CHAPTER XIII

THAT night, Coupeau went on the spree. The next day, Gervaise received ten francs from her son Etienne, who was an engineer on a railway. The young fellow sent her a few francs occasionally, knowing that they were not very well off at home. She made some soup, and ate it all alone, for that blackguard Coupeau did not come back. On Monday he was still absent, and on Tuesday likewise. The whole week went by. Ah, ye dogs! if a lady had only carried him off, that would indeed have been a piece of good fortune. But on the Sunday it happened that Gervaise received a printed paper, which frightened her at first, because it appeared like a communication from the commissary of police. Afterwards she became reassured; it was merely to inform her that her husband was in a fair way to turn up his toes at Sainte-Anne. The paper was more politely worded, only it came to the same thing. Yes, it was, indeed, a lady who had got hold of Coupeau, and her name was Sophie-Put-'em-to-Sleep, the drunkard's last good friend.

Gervaise did not put herself about. He knew the way; he could very well get home from the asylum by himself. They had cured him there so often that they could once more do him the sorry service of putting him on his legs again. Had she not heard that very morning that for a week Coupeau had been seen as round as a ball, rolling about Belleville from one dram-shop to another in the society of Mes-Bottes? Exactly so; and it was Mes-Bottes, too, who stood "Sam." He must have grabbed his missus's stocking with all her savings.

Ah, they were drinking some considerable amount of money there, capable of giving one every abominable disease imaginable! So much the better if it had given Coupeau the colic! And Gervaise was especially furious when she considered that this selfish pair had not even thought of calling for her to stand her drink. Did ever anyone hear of such a thing?—a week's spree, and not the least gallantry shown to the ladies! When one swills by oneself, one may go off by oneself, so there!

However, on the Monday, as Gervaise had a nice little meal for the evening, the remains of some beans and a pint of wine, she pretended to herself that a walk would give her an appetite. The letter from the asylum, which she had left lying on the drawers, worried her. The snow had melted, the day was mild and grey, and on the whole fine, with just a slight keenness in the air which was refreshing. She started at noon, for her walk was a long one. She had to cross Paris, and her lame leg was always lagging. The streets were crowded, and the people amused her; she reached her destination very pleasantly. When she had given her name, she was told a most amazing story, to the effect that Coupeau had been fished out of the river, close to the Pont-Neuf. He had jumped over the parapet, under the conviction that a bearded man was barring his way. A fine jump, was it not? And as for finding out how Coupeau got to be on the Pont-Neuf, that was a matter he could not even explain himself.

One of the keepers escorted Gervaise. She was ascending the staircase, when she heard howlings which made her shiver to her very bones.

"Eh! he's playing a nice music, isn't he?" observed the keeper.

"Who is?" she inquired.

"Why, your old man! He's been howling out like that ever since the day before yesterday; and he dances, you'll just see."

Ah, good God! what a sight! She stood like one

transfixed. The cell was padded from the floor to the ceiling. On the floor there were two straw mats, one on top of the other; and in a corner were spread a mattress and a bolster, and that was all. Inside there, Coupeau was dancing and yelling. A regular guy of the Courtille, with his blouse in tatters and his limbs beating the air; but not a funny guy—oh, no!—a guy whose terrible capers made every hair of your head stand on end. He wore the mask of one about to die. Good heavens! what a smash-up! He bumped up against the window, then retired backwards, beating time with his arms, and shaking his hands as though he were endeavouring to wrench them off and fling them in somebody's face. One meets with jokers in the low dancing places who imitate that, only they imitate it badly. One must see this drunkard's rigadon danced if one wants to know what it is like when carried through in earnest. The song also has its merits, a continuous yell worthy of carnival-time, a mouth wide open giving forth the same hoarse trombone notes for hours on end. Coupeau had the howl of a beast with a crushed paw. Let the orchestra strike up! Gentlemen, choose your partners!

"Lord! what is the matter with him? what is the matter with him?" repeated Gervaise, seized with terror.

A house surgeon, a big, fair, rosy-looking fellow, and wearing a white apron, was quietly sitting taking notes. The case was a curious one; the doctor did not leave the patient.

"Remain a while if you like," said he to the laundress; "but keep quiet. Try and speak to him; he will not recognise you."

Coupeau, indeed, did not even seem to see his wife. She had merely had a bad view of him on entering, he was wriggling about so much. When she looked him full in the face, she stood aghast. Good heavens! was it possible he had a visage like that, his eyes all bloodshot, and his lips covered with scabs? She would assuredly never have known him. To begin with, he was making

too many grimaces, without any reason, his mouth suddenly out of all shape, his nose curled up, his cheeks drawn in, a perfect animal's muzzle. He had such a hot skin that the air steamed around him; and his hide was as though varnished, covered with a heavy sweat which trickled off him. In his mad dance, one could observe all the same that he was not at his ease; his head was heavy and his limbs ached.

Gervaise approached the house surgeon, who was strumming a tune with the tips of his fingers on the back of his chair.

"I suppose, sir, it's serious then, this time?"

The house surgeon nodded his head without answering.

"I say, isn't he talking to himself? Eh! don't you hear? What's it he says?"

"About things he sees," murmured the young man. "Keep quiet; let me listen"

Coupeau was speaking in a jerky voice. A glimmer of fun lit up his eyes. He gazed on the floor, to the right, to the left, and turned about, as though he had been strolling in the Bois de Vincennes, talking with himself.

"Ah! that's nice, that's grand! There're cottages, a regular fair! And some jolly fine music! What a Balthazar's feast! They're breaking up the crockery in there—Awfully swell. Now it's being lit up; red balls in the air, and it jumps, and it flies! Oh! oh! what a quantity of lanterns in the trees! It's awfully jolly! There's water flowing everywhere, fountains, cascades, water which sings, oh! with the voice of a chorister—The cascades are grand!"

And he drew himself up, as though the better to listen to the delicious song of the water; he sucked in forcibly, fancying he was drinking the fresh spray blown from the fountains. But, little by little, his face took an agonised expression again. Then he crouched down, and flew quicker than ever around the walls of the cell, uttering low threats.

"Still those traps, all that!—I thought as much—Silence, you set of swindlers. Yés, you're making fun of me. It's for that that you're drinking and howling inside there with your wretches—I'll demolish you, you and your cottage—Name of God! will you leave me in peace?"

He clenched his fists; then he gave forth a hoarse cry, stooping as he ran. And he stutted, his teeth chattering with terror.

"It is that I may kill myself. No, I won't throw myself in—All that water signifies that I've no heart. No, I won't throw myself in!"

The cascades, which fled at his approach, came forward as he retired. And suddenly he looked stupidly around him, mumbling, in a voice which could scarcely be heard,—

"It isn't possible; they've set jugglers against me!"

"I must go, sir, good night!" said Gervaise to the house surgeon. "It puts me out too much; I'll come again."

She was quite white. Coupeau was going on with his break-down from the window to the mattress, and from the mattress to the window, perspiring, toiling, beating the same time. Then she hastened off. But though she scrambled down the stairs, she still heard her husband's death dance until she reached the bottom. Ah! good God! how nice it was out of doors; one could breathe there.

That evening, all the household were talking of old Coupeau's strange illness. The Boches, who now treated the Hobbler in a most off-hand manner, offered her, however, a drink in their room, just to get the details from her. Mauame Lorilleux came in, and Madame Poisson also. They made endless remarks. Boche had had an acquaintance, a carpenter, who had gone along the Rue Saint-Martin perfectly naked, and had died dancing the polka; he used to drink absinthe. The ladies wriggled with laughter, because it appeared to them very funny, all

the same, although rather distressing. Then as they did not quite comprehend, Gervaise pushed the people aside, and called for room ; and in the centre of the apartment she acted Coupeau, bawling, jumping, throwing herself about with the most abominable grimaces while the others were looking on. Yes, on her word of honour it was exactly like that ! Then the others expressed their amazement ; it was not possible ! a man could not have lasted three hours at such a business. Well ! she swore it on all she held most sacred, Coupeau had been at it since the day before, thirty-six hours already. Besides, if they did not believe her, they could go and see themselves.

Madame Lorilleux, however, declared, thank you for nothing ! she had had enough of Sainte-Anne ; she would even keep Lorilleux from putting a foot inside its gates. Virginie, whose shop was going from bad to worse, and who had a most funereal face, was content to murmur that life was not always gay, ah ! by Jupiter, no ! The glasses being emptied Gervaise wished the company good night. Directly she had left off speaking, her head assumed the crazy look of a madwoman, with her eyes wide open. No doubt she saw her husband stepping his waltz.

On getting up the next morning, Gervaise promised herself she would not return to Sainte-Anne again. What use would it be ? She did not wish to go off her head also. However, every ten minutes, she fell to musing—became absent-minded. It would be curious though, if he were still throwing his legs about. When twelve o'clock struck, she could no longer withstand the temptation ; she started off and did not notice how long the walk was, her brain was so full of her desire to go, and the dread of what awaited her.

Oh ! there was no occasion for her to ask for news. She heard Coupeau's song the moment she got to the foot of the staircase. Exactly the same tune, exactly the same dance. She might have thought herself going up again after having been down for a minute. The attendant of

the day before, who was carrying some jugs of infusion along the corridor, winked his eye as he met her, by way of doing the amiable.

"Still the same, then?" she said.

"Oh! just the same," he replied, without stopping.

She entered, but she stayed near the door, because there were some people with Coupeau. The fair, rosy, house surgeon was standing up, having given his chair to a bald old gentleman who was decorated and had a face like a martin. He was doubtless the head doctor, for his glance was as sharp and piercing as a gimlet. All those who deal in sudden death have a glance like that.

Gervaise, however, had not come to look at this gentleman, and she stood on tiptoe behind his bald pate, devouring Coupeau with her eyes. This madman was dancing and yelling still louder than the day before. She recollected having seen in former days, at the balls in mid-Lent, sturdy men from the wash-house cut capers for a whole night; but never, no never, would she have conceived that a man could take pleasure in it so long; when she talked of pleasure, it was merely a figure of speech, for there is no amusement in turning somersaults in spite of oneself, as if one had swallowed a powder magazine. Coupeau, soaked with perspiration, was smoking more, that was all. His mouth seemed to have grown larger by dint of shouting. He walked so often from the mattress to the window, that he had made quite a little path along the floor; the matting was worn away by his old shoes.

No, certainly, it was not a pretty sight; and Gervaise, all trembling, asked herself why she had returned. To think that, the evening before, they had accused her at the Boches' of exaggerating the picture! Ah! well, she had not done half enough! Now, she saw more clearly how Coupeau set about it, his eyes wide open looking into vacancy, and she would never forget it. She overheard a few words between the house surgeon and the head doctor. The former was giving some details of the

night ; her husband had talked and thrown himself about. Then the bald headed old gentleman, who was not very polite, by the way, at length seemed to become aware of her presence ; and when the house surgeon had informed him that she was the patient's wife, he began to ask her questions, in the harsh manner of a commissary of police.

"Did this man's father drink?"

"Yes, sir, just a little, like everyone. He killed himself by tumbling of a roof one day when he was tipsy."

"Did his mother drink?"

"Well, sir, like everybody else, you know, a drop here, a drop there. Oh! the family is very respectable. There was a brother who died quite young in convulsions."

The doctor looked at her with his piercing eye. He resumed in his rough voice,—

"And you, do you drink?"

Gervaise stammered, made a protestation, and placed her hand upon her heart as if to take her solemn oath.

"You drink! Take care; see where drink leads to. Some day or other, you will die thus."

Then she remained close to the wall. The doctor had turned his back on her. He squatted down, without troubling himself as to whether his overcoat trailed in the dust of the matting. For a long time he studied Coupeau's trembling, watching for its reappearance, following it with his glance. That day the legs were going in their turn, the trembling had gone down from the hands to the feet; a regular puppet with his strings being pulled, throwing his limbs about whilst the trunk of his body remained as stiff as a piece of wood. The disease increased little by little. It was like a musical box under the skin; it set off every three or four seconds, and rolled along for a moment; then it stopped, and then it started off again; just exactly as the little shiver which shakes stray dogs in winter, when cold or standing in some doorway for protection. Already the middle of the body and the shoulders quivered like water on the point of boiling. It was a funny demolition all the same,

going off wriggling like a girl on whom tickling has its effect.

Coupeau, meanwhile, was complaining in a hollow voice. He appeared to suffer much more than the day before. His broken murmurs disclosed all sorts of ailments. Thousands of pins were pricking him. He felt something heavy all about his body; some cold, wet animal seemed crawling over his thighs and digging its fangs into his flesh. Then there were other animals sticking to his shoulders, tearing his back with their claws.

"I'm thirsty, oh, I'm thirsty!" he constantly groaned.

The house surgeon handed him a little lemonade from a small shelf. Coupeau seized the mug in both hands, and greedily took a mouthful, spilling half the liquid over himself; but he spat it out at once, with a furious disgust, exclaiming,

"Name of God! it's brandy!"

Then, on a sign from the doctor, the house surgeon tried to make him drink some water, without letting go the bottle. This time he swallowed the mouthful, yelling as though he had swallowed fire.

"It's brandy, name of God! it's brandy!"

Since the night before, everything he had to drink was brandy to him. It redoubled his thirst, and he could no longer drink, because everything burnt him. They had brought him some broth, but they were manifestly trying to poison him, for the broth smelt of "vitriol." The bread was sour and mouldy. There was nothing but poison around him. The cell stank of sulphur. He even charged people with rubbing matches under his nose to infect him.

The doctor had risen, and was listening to Coupeau, who was again beholding phantoms at mid-day. Was he not imagining that he saw cobwebs on the walls as big as the sails of a ship? Then these cobwebs became nets with meshes which grew smaller and larger, a droll sort of plaything! Black balls passed in and out of the

meshes, regular conjurers' balls, at first as small as marbles, and then as big as cannon balls; and they increased and decreased in size, just for the sake of annoying him. Quite suddenly, he exclaimed,—

"Oh! the rats, there're the rats, now!"

It was the balls which were becoming rats. These dreadful animals got fatter and fatter, passed through the net, and jumped on to the mattress, where they went out of sight. There was also a monkey which came out of the wall, and went back into the wall, and which approached so near him each time, that he drew back quite afraid of having his nose bitten off. Suddenly there was another change, the walls were probably cutting capers, for he yelled out, choking with terror and rage,—

"That's it, gee up! shake me, I don't care!—Gee up, shanty! gee up! tumble down! Yes, ring the bells, you lot of crows! play the organ to keep me from calling the police!—And they've put a machine behind the wall, the blackguards! I can hear it; it snorts; they're going to blow us up—Fire! damnation! fire! There's a cry of fire! there it blazes. Oh, it's getting lighter, lighter! all the sky's burning, red fires, green fires, yellow fires—Hi! help! fire!"

His cries were now lost in a rattle. He now only mumbled disconnected words, foaming at the mouth, his chin wet with saliva. The doctor rubbed his nose with his finger, a movement no doubt habitual with him when he was examining serious cases. He turned to the house surgeon, and asked him in a low voice,—

"And the temperature a hundred degrees yet, is it not?"

"Yes, sir."

The doctor twitched his mouth. He continued there another two minutes, his eyes fixed on Coupeau. Then he shrugged his shoulders, and added,—

"The same treatment, broth, milk, lemonade, and the potion of extract of quinine. Do not leave him, and call me if there is any need."

He went out, and Gervaise went after him to ask him if there was any hope. But he walked so stiffly along the corridor that she did not dare speak to him. She stood rooted there a minute, hesitating whether to go back and look at her husband. The time she had already passed there had been most distressing. As she again heard him shouting out that the lemonade smelt of brandy, she hastened away, having had enough of the performance. In the streets, the galloping of the horses and the noise of the vehicles made her imagine that all the inmates of Sainte-Anne were at her heels. And that doctor who had threatened her! Really, she already believed she had the disease.

In the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or, the Boches and the others were naturally awaiting her. The moment she appeared, they called her into the doorkeeper's room. Well, was ~~Gid~~ Coupeau in the land of the living yet? Good heavens! yes, he still lived! Boche appeared amazed and confounded; he had bet a bottle that old Coupeau would not last till the evening. What! he still lived! And they all showed their astonishment, and slapped their thighs. There was a fellow who lasted! Madame Lorilleux reckoned up the hours: thirty-six hours and twenty-four hours, sixty hours. By Jove! already sixty hours that he had been performing with his mouth and legs! Such a feat of strength had never been seen before. But Boche, who was laughing on the wrong side of his mouth because of his bet, put questions to Gervaise with an air of doubt, asking her if she was quite certain he had not filed off behind her back. Oh, no, he had no wish to; he jumped about too much. Then Boche, still doubting, begged her to show them again a little how he went on, for them to see. Yes, yes, a little more. The request was general. The company said she would be very nice if she would oblige, for just then two neighbours happened to be there who had not been there the day before, and who had come down purposely to see the performance. The doorkeeper

called to the persons to make room; they cleared the centre of the apartment, pushing one another with their elbows, and quivering with curiosity. Gervaise, however, hung down her head. Really, she was afraid she would make herself ill. Desirous, though, of showing that she did not refuse for the sake of being pressed, she tried two or three little leaps; but she felt quite strange, and threw herself back. On her word of honour, she was not equal to it.

When Gervaise gave over, there was a murmur of disappointment; it was such a pity, she imitated it perfectly. However, if she could not do it, it was no use insisting. And, on Virginie returning to her shop, they forgot old Coupeau, to gossip about the Poissons and their home, a regular bear-garden now. The day before, the bailiffs had been there; the policeman was about to lose his place; as for Lantier, he was now courting the girl of the eating-house next door, a fine woman, who spoke of setting up as a tripe-seller. Ah! it was amusing, everyone already beheld a tripe-seller occupying the shop; after confections should come something substantial. That cuckold Poisson had a funny head altogether. How, goodness gracious! could a man, whose business it was to be sharp, be such a noodle in his own home? But they stopped talking all at once on beholding Gervaise, whom they had no longer been watching, and who was going through a part of her performance quite alone in a corner of the room, her hands and feet trembling like Coupeau's. Bravo! that was it, that was all they wanted. She stood with a bewildered look as though just waking up from a dream. Then she went off erect, wishing everyone good-night. She was going to try and get a little sleep.

The next day the Boches saw her go off at twelve, the same as on the two previous days. They wished her a pleasant afternoon. That day the corridor of Sainte-Anne actually shook with Coupeau's yells and kicks. She had not left the stairs when she heard him yell out, -

"What a lot of beetles! Come here again that I may smash you! Ah! they want to kill me, ah! the beetles. I'm a bigger swell than the lot of you. Clear out, in God's name, clear out."

For an instant she stood panting before the door. Was he then fighting against an army? When she came in, the performance had increased and embellished. Coupeau was a raving madman, like one escaped from Charenton. He was throwing himself about in the centre of the cell, placing his hands all about, on himself, on the walls, on the floor, turning head over heels, smashing away into space; and he wanted to open the window, and he hid himself, defended himself, called, answered, produced all this devilment without the least assistance, in the exasperated way of a man beset by a mob of people. Then Gervaise understood that he imagined he was on the roof, laying down sheets of zinc. He imitated the bellows with his mouth; he shook the iron about in the fire, and knelt down so as to pass his thumb along the edges of the mat, thinking that he was soldering it. Yes, his handicraft came back to him at the moment of going off the hooks; and if he yelled so loud, if he fought on his roof, it was because ugly scoundrels were keeping him from doing his work properly. On all the neighbouring roofs were villains mocking and tormenting him. Besides that, the jokers were letting troops of rats loose all around his legs. Ah! the filthy beasts, he saw them always. Though he kept crushing them, bringing his foot down with all his strength, fresh strings of them continued passing, until they quite covered the roof. And there were spiders there too. He quickly pressed his trousers against his thigh to squash some big spiders which had crept up his leg. Sacred thunder! he would never complete his day's work—they wished to destroy him—his employer would send him to the Mazas prison. Then, whilst making haste, he suddenly fancied that he had a steam-engine in his stomach; with his mouth wide open, he puffed out

the smoke, a dense smoke which filled the cell, and found an outlet by the window; and, bending forward, still puffing, he looked outside at the cloud of smoke as it unrolled and ascended to the sky, where it concealed the sun.

"Hallo!" he cried; "there goes the band of the Chauv^{see} Clignancourt disguised as bears with drums."

He kept crouching before the window, as though he had been looking on at a procession in a street from some house-top.

"There's the cavalcade, lions, and panthers making grimaces—there're brats dressed up like dogs and cats—there's tall Clemence, with her wig full of feathers. Ah! by Jupiter, she's turning head over heels. I say, dearie, let's hook it. Eh! you confounded asses, just you leave her alone. Don't fire, thunder, don't fire—"

His voice got high, hoarse, and terrified, and he stooped down quickly, saying that the police and the military were below, men who were aiming at him with their rifles. In the wall, he saw the barrel of a pistol directed to his chest. They had come to take the girl from him.

"Don't fire, in God's name, don't fire—"

Then, the houses were falling in, he imitated the crashing up of a whole neighbourhood collapsing; and all disappeared, all flew off. But he had not time to take breath, other pictures passed with extraordinary swiftness. A furious desire to speak filled his mouth full of words which he uttered without any connection, and with a gurgling sound in his throat. He always went on raising his voice.

"Hallo, it's you? Good-day. No jokes, don't make me eat up your hair."

And he passed his hand before his face; he blew to send the hairs away. The house surgeon questioned him.

"Who is it you see?"

"My wife, of course."

He was gazing at the wall, with his back to Gervaise. The latter had a pretty fright, and she examined the wall,

to see if she also 'could not catch sight of herself there. He went on talking.

"Now, you know, none of your coaxing—I won't be tied up—Good heavens! you are smart, you have got a fine dress. Where did you get it from? Wait a minute and I'll finish you. Ah! you're hiding someone behind your skirts. Who is it, eh? Stop down, that I may see. Name of God! it's him again."

Taking a fearful spring, he went head first against the wall; but the padding deadened the blow. One only could hear his body rebounding on to the matting, where the shock had driven him.

"Who is it you see?" repeated the house surgeon.

"The hatter! the hatter!" roared Coupeau.

And the house surgeon put questions to Gervaise, while the latter stuttered without being able to answer, for this scene stirred up within her all the vexations of her life. The zinc-worker thrust out his fists.

"We'll settle this up, you and I, young 'un. It's quite time I closed your account. Ah! you coolly come, with that scamp on your arm, to make fun of me before everyone. Well, I'm going to throttle you—yes, yes, I; and without putting any gloves on either. I'll put an end to your swaggering. Take that. And that, that, that."

He struck about in space. Then rage took possession of him. Having bumped against the wall in walking backwards, he imagined he was being attacked behind. He turned round, and ferociously hammered away at the padding. He sprang about, jumped from one corner to another, knocked his stomach, his back, his shoulder, rolled over, and picked himself up again. His bones softened, his flesh had a sound of damp tow. And he accompanied this fearsome game with atrocious threats, and wild and guttural cries. However, the battle must have been going badly for him, for his breathing came quicker, his eyes were starting out of his head, and he seemed little by little to be seized with the cowardice of a child.

"Murder! murder! Clear out both of you! Oh, the beasts, they're laughing. She must give in; it's settled. Ah! the brigand, he's murdering her. He's cutting off her leg with his knife. The other leg's on the ground; the stomach's in two, it's full of blood. Oh, my God! oh, my God! oh, my God!"

And, covered with perspiration, his hair standing on end, a horrible object to witness, he retired backwards, violently waving his arms, as if to send the hateful sight from him. He uttered two heartrending wails, and fell flat on his back on the mattress, against which his heels had caught.

"He's dead, sir, he's dead," said Gervaise, clasping her hands."

The house surgeon had approached, and was pulling Coupeau into the middle of the mattress. No, he was not dead. They had taken his shoes off. His bare feet stuck out at the end, and they were dancing all by themselves, one beside the other, in time, a little quick and regular dance.

Just then the principal doctor entered. He had brought two of his colleagues—one thin, the other fat, and both decorated like himself. All three stooped down without saying a word, and examined the man all over; then they quickly conversed together in a low voice. They had bared Coupeau from his thighs to his shoulders, and by standing on tiptoe Gervaise could see the naked trunk spread out. Well! it was complete. The trembling had gone down from the arms and gone up from the legs, and now the trunk itself was getting lively! The puppet was positively wriggling its body about as well. There were smiles along the ribs, a breathlessness of the bosom, which appeared splitting with laughter. And everything was moving; there was no denying it. The muscles were dancing quadrilles; the skin was vibrating like a drum; the hairs were bowing to each other as they waltzed. In short, it was probably the great clear out, something like the final gallop, when the day breaks and

all the dancers hold each other by the hand, and stamp their heels on the floor.

"He's sleeping," murmured the head doctor.

And he called the two others' attention to the man's face. Coupeau, his eyes shut, had little nervous twitches which drew up his features. He was more hideous still, thus flattened out, with his jaw projecting, and his face deformed like a corpse's that had suffered from nightmare; but the doctors, having caught sight of the feet, went and looked at them, with an air of deep interest. The feet were still dancing. Yes, although Coupeau slept, the feet danced. Oh! their owner might snore, that did not matter to them, they continued their little game without either hurrying or slackening. Regular mechanical feet, feet which took their pleasure wherever they found it.

Gervaise, having seen the doctors place their hands on her husband, wished to feel him also. She approached gently, and laid a hand on his shoulder, and she kept it there a minute. Good God! whatever was taking place inside? It danced down into the very depths of the body; the bones themselves must have been jumping. Quiverings, undulations, coming from afar, flowed like a river beneath the skin. When she pressed a little she felt as if she could distinguish the suffering cries of the marrow. With the naked eye one only saw the little waving motions forming dimples, as on the surface of an eddy; but within there must have been a terrible devastation going on. What a terrible work, a work worthy of a mole. It was the "vitriol" of the Assommoir which was giving blows with a pickaxe in there. The whole body was soaked with it, and well, the work had to be finished, crumbling up Coupeau, and carrying him off in the general and continuous trembling of the entire carcass.

The doctors had gone off. At the end of an hour, Gervaise, who had remained with the house surgeon, repeated in a low voice,—

"He's dead sir—he's dead!"

But the house surgeon, who was watching the feet, said "No" with a movement of his head. The bare feet sticking out beyond the mattress still danced on. They were not specially clean, and the nails were long. Several more hours passed away. Suddenly they stiffened and became motionless. Then the house surgeon turned towards Gervaise, saying—

"It's all over now."

Death alone had stopped those unhappy feet.

When Gervaise got back to the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or she found, at the Boches', a lot of women who were cackling in excited tones. She thought they were awaiting her to have the latest news, just as on the other days.

"He's gone," said she, quietly, as she pushed open the door, looking fagged and stupid.

But no one listened to her. The whole household was upside down. Oh! a most extraordinary story! Poisson had caught his wife with Lantier. Exact particulars were not known, because everyone had a different tale. However, he had appeared before them just when they were not expecting him. Some further details were given which the ladies repeated to one another as they pursed their lips. A sight like that had naturally brought Poisson out of his shell. He was a thorough tiger! This man, who talked but little and who always seemed to walk with a stick up his back, had begun to roar and jump about. Then nothing more had been heard. Lantier had most probably explained the matter to the husband. Anyhow, it could not go on much longer; and Boche announced that the girl of the eating-house next door was for certain going to take the shop for selling tripe. That sly dog of a hatter adored tripe.

On seeing Madame Lorilleux and Madame Lerat arrive, Gervaise repeated faintly,—

"He has gone off. Gracious goodness! four days dancing and yelling—"

Then the two sisters could not do otherwise than draw out their handkerchiefs. Their brother had had many

faults, but after all he was their brother. Boche shrugged his shoulders, and said loud enough to be heard by everybody,—

“Bah! it's a drunkard the less!”

From that day, as Gervaise often lost her head a little, one of the amusements of the house was to see her imitate Coupeau. * It was no longer necessary to press her; she gave the performance gratis, her hands and feet trembling as she uttered little involuntary shrieks. No doubt she had caught that at Sainte-Anne, through looking at her old man too long. But she was not lucky; it did not kill her as it did him. It went no further than making grimaces like an escaped monkey, which caused the street urchins to pelt her with cabbage stalks.

Gervaise lasted in this state several months. She fell lower and lower still, submitting to the grossest outrages, and dying of starvation a little every day. As soon as she had four sous, she drank and fought the walls. She was employed on all the dirty errands of the district. M. Marescot had decided to turn her out of her room on the sixth floor. But, as old Bru was just about that time found dead in his hole under the staircase, the landlord had allowed her to turn into it. Now she roosted there in the place of old Bru. It was inside there, on some old straw, that her teeth chattered, whilst she cried for food, and her bones were frozen. The earth would not have her evidently. She was becoming idiotic; she did not even think of making an end of herself by jumping out of the sixth floor window on to the pavement of the courtyard beneath. Death was to take her little by little, bit by bit, dragging her thus to the end through the accursed existence she had made for herself. It was never even exactly known what she did die of. There was some talk of a cold, but the truth was she died of privation, and of the filth and hardship of her spoilt life. Overgorging and dissoluteness killed her, so said the Lorilleux. One morning, as there was a bad smell in the passage, people recollected that she had not been seen

for two days, and she was discovered in her hole already green.

It happened to be old Bazouge who came with the pauper's coffin under his arm to pack her up. He was again very drunk that day, but in a good key all the same, and as lively as a cricket. When he recognised the customer he had to deal with, he uttered several philosophical reflections whilst carrying out his little business.

"Everyone goes off. There's no occasion for jostling one another, there's room for all. And it's stupid being in a hurry, because one does not arrive so fast. All I want to do is to please everybody. Some will, others won't. What's the end of it? There's one who wouldn't, then she would. So she was made to wait. Anyhow, it's all right now, and, 'pon my word! she's earned it! Merrily O!"

And when he took hold of Gervaise in his big dirty hands he was seized with emotion, and he gently raised this woman who had shown so great a longing for him. Then, as he laid her out with paternal care at the bottom of the coffin, he stuttered, between two hic-coughs,—

"You know—now listen—it's me, Bibi-the-Gay, called the ladies' consoler. There, you're happy. Go to peepy-peepy, my beauty now!"

THE END

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